

CHAPTER III

ARCHITECTURE

The architecture of the Coast Guard has come full circle. The first federally-funded structures from 1848 were simply gabled storage buildings for a boat and rescue equipment. When the Life-Saving Service solidified in the mid-1870s and began to gain more political clout, Sumner Kimball saw to it that the stations were more pleasing architecturally. Stations took on the architectural style of the day and became highly ornate. When the Life-Saving Service merged with the Revenue Cutter Service to become the Coast Guard in 1915, stations started to become more standard and less decorative. This was due to a shift toward a less detailed architecture in America and also as a cost-saving measure. The Coast Guard has continued to simplify the detailing over the years, and since WWII, has come full circle to the point of creating a purely functional architecture once again.

The first life-saving shelters built were those of the Massachusetts Humane Society. Their first unmanned hut was erected in 1789 on Lovell's Island in Boston Harbor. It was a simple structure, 8' square and 7' tall, outfitted with a wood stove and supplies of food and clothing. A nearby resident was appointed to look after it.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Eugene V. York, "The Architecture of the United States Life-Saving Stations" (Master's thesis, Boston University, 1983), 3.

The first lifeboat station was built by the Massachusetts Humane Society in 1807 at Cohasset, Massachusetts. The unkept station housed a surfboat and rescue equipment and was probably just big enough to house the 30' surfboat. By 1872, the Society had built seventy-six lifeboat stations and eight huts along the Massachusetts coast.⁶⁷

The first federally-funded stations were constructed in 1848 when Congress appropriated \$10,000 for eight boathouses along the New Jersey shore. These unmanned and unkept stations were simple, one-story, gabled boathouses, 16' wide by 28' deep (Figure 32). They were surfaced in shingles and were probably very similar to the lifeboat stations built by the Massachusetts Humane Society.

Through the 1850s, the Revenue Marine continued to oversee the building of stations and extended their coverage to include North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Texas. In 1854, the Great Lakes began to see coverage with 47 lifeboat stations. After this building campaign, new station construction ceased and was not reactivated again until Kimball's arrival in 1871.⁶⁸

With Faunce's inspection report on the condition of the life-saving station network in 1871, new stations were quickly planned to replace old, outmoded, or dilapidated stations, and to fill in the gaps between stations sited too far apart. These new stations were the first to provide for a live-in keeper and crew of six. They were 1-1/2 stories tall, 18' wide by 42' deep, and surfaced entirely with shingles. They were referred to as "red houses" because they were painted entirely red. Instead of a single

⁶⁷Ibid., 4.

⁶⁸Ibid., 7, 12-13.



Figure 32. Spermaceti Cove, New Jersey, Boathouse (1848) in 1926. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Life-Saving Service: Stations and Architecture File).

boathroom, the lower story was divided into a large room for the boat and heavy equipment, and a smaller living room in back for the crew. Upstairs was a room for lighter life-saving apparatus and a bunk room for the crew. With the completion of these Red House stations in 1873, the total number of stations was brought to 82.⁶⁹

With the Congressional appropriation of \$100,000 in 1873, a new design was developed for the stations. Twenty-three of what have become known as 1874-type stations were built. These were the first stations to employ a recognizable architectural style (Figure 33). The stations were designed in the mode of the Carpenter Gothic and

⁶⁹Ibid., 13-14.



Figure 33. Plum Island Life-Saving Station (Chandler, 1873-74), Massachusetts, an 1874-Type Station. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Life-Saving Service: Stations and Architecture File).

the Stick Style. Influences from the outdated Carpenter Gothic can be seen in the beaded vertical siding and intricate scroll work in the gable. From the Stick Style came the station's gable stick work, brackets and half-timbering to represent the structural elements of the building. Disregarding the detailing, the station design was much the same as the Red House stations from 1871 in size and layout. A lookout platform was added to the roof with an internal ladder to reach it.

A year later, a slightly different plan came out which has become known as the 1875-type station. Again, the main difference between the station plans was in the detailing. The 1875-type station was essentially the same size as the 1874-type stations, 19' wide and 43' deep. It was still 1-1/2 stories tall but it had a steeper roof to provide more useable space on the second floor. The first floor had the same divisions, but the



Figure 34. Cape Arago Life-Saving Station (Chandler, 1878), a Modified 1875-Type Station. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Life-Saving Service Photos: Personnel File).

second floor was divided into a large room at the front, a store room at the middle, and two bedrooms in the back. At least 16 of the 1875-type stations were built on the Atlantic and Great Lake coasts. For Oregon, Washington, and California, a modified version was drawn which altered some of the detailing, eliminated the lookout tower, and added dormers. This is the version that was built at Coos Bay, Oregon, for the Cape Arago Life-Saving Station (Figure 34).⁷⁰

The Life-Saving Service built from a standard set of plans, but it was not unusual for builders to make alterations to suit the local materials and conditions. The Cape

⁷⁰Shanks, *The U.S. Life-Saving Service*, 214-18.

Arago station did not have a lookout tower or platform on its roof but instead substituted a balcony above the boatroom doors. This balcony can be found on the 1875-type clipped gable stations, but the Cape Arago Station did not have a clipped gable. The Cape Arago Life-Saving Station is discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

The 1874-type design has been attributed to Francis Ward Chandler, the first station type connected to a known designer. Chandler was working in the office of Alfred Mullett, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, when Kimball requested plans from Mullett's office in 1874. It is not known unequivocally that Chandler was the designer of the 1874-type station, but has been attributed to Chandler since his name appears on a bill for the plans of 1875-type station and the designs are nearly identical. Chandler had previously worked in the office of Ware and Van Brunt, a firm practicing in the High Victorian Gothic style. He left Washington in 1875 to form the firm of Cabot and Chandler in Boston.⁷¹

In July 1875, J. Lake Parkinson was appointed to the new position of Assistant Superintendent for Construction within the Life-Saving Service. This allowed for Kimball to directly supervise the designs for his stations. The first design from Parkinson was the 1876-type station. Basically, the station is the same as the 1875-type; however, it has some subtle early Queen Anne influences, such as fish scale shingles and scalloped board ends. Parkinson was also responsible for the Philadelphia Exposition life-saving station, the first exposition station used to promote the Life-Saving Service.⁷²

⁷¹York, 18-20.

⁷²Shanks, *The U.S. Life-Saving Service*, 219-22.

The Superintendent of Construction was responsible for the construction of the stations and for additions and major repairs. Minor repairs were handled by the crewmen themselves. The construction of the stations was performed by contractors in the locality. Advertisements seeking bids were placed in the local newspaper, specifications and plans were sent to interested contractors, proposals were received, and contracts were awarded. The Superintendent of Construction then periodically inspected the station as building progressed.⁷³

Parkinson designed five stations of which multiple copies were built and several one-of-a-kind stations before his final design, the 1882-type station. His designs did not vary much from the 1876-type station, though his Lake Superior-type station offered a cross plan, the first station to break from the rectangular mold.⁷⁴ All were done in a mix of Gothic and Stick styles. The 1882-type station featured large dormers on each side and the first use of an enclosed watch tower.

Several high-style stations were designed on commission after the 1882-type station by prominent, independent architects. Paul J. Pelz designed what in 1885 can be only described as passé High Victorian Gothic meets Queen Anne at Deal, New Jersey (Figure 35). This design can be considered the pinnacle of ornateness in Life-Saving Service architecture. Its sister station at Bay Head was featured in the 15 September 1885 issue of *American Architecture and Building News*.⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid., 222-24.

⁷⁴York, 32.

⁷⁵Shanks, *The U.S. Life-Saving Service*, 224-25.



Figure 35. Deal Life-Saving Station (Pelz, 1882-83) in New Jersey. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Life-Saving Service: Stations and Architecture File).

John G. Pelton of San Francisco designed a Queen Anne residence for the Golden Gate Park station in 1884 that was repeated at Willapa Bay Station in Washington. These two residences can be considered the only true Queen Anne structures built by the Life-Saving Service. Even the New York firm of McKim, Mead and White participated and designed a masonry station for Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island, in 1888. It is unknown why firms of such stature designed one-of-a-kind stations in the period between Parkinson's departure and the arrival of the next Superintendent of Construction. However, the locations of the stations in wealthy resort areas might have been the reason for the higher profile designs. Kimball himself wrote, "Those [stations] built later are more comely in appearance, while a few, located conspicuously at popular seaside

resorts, make some pretensions to architectural taste.”⁷⁶ The desire to break away from the tired Gothic and Stick styles might have played a role, too.

In 1885, Albert Buruley Bibb was working in the Office of Construction. He was given the task of expanding 29 of the old Red House stations. Using the current Shingle style as his mode of choice, he added a lean-to to either side of the rectangular station and extended the roof down over the additions in one unbroken pitch. He then covered all of the work in shingles. The new building now hunkered down in the dunes essentially converting a tall, vertical building into a visually shorter, horizontal structure. Bibb successfully moved the Life-Saving Service away from the Gothic verticality of the past.

Bibb’s first new station design is referred to as a Bibb #2. At least 22 were built between 1887 and 1892 for the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. The design departed dramatically from the previous designs of Parkinson, creating what is essentially a 1-1/2 story bungalow with a boatroom attached like a garage. This was the first station to emphasize the living quarters over the boatroom. The gables were clad in shingles while the first floor had horizontal siding. Capping the boatroom was an enclosed lookout. The style represents an early, strong disassociation from the Gothic style.

Bibb went on to design a total of four station plans and two one-of-a-kind stations. On the West Coast, he is best remembered for designing the Fort Point-type and Marquette-type stations. The design names come from the first location at which the station was built. Only three Fort Point-type stations were built, but all were constructed

⁷⁶Kimball, 8.

on the Pacific Coast, one of which was at Point Adams (1889) at Hammond, Oregon. The Fort Point-type was the first station to have a detached boathouse. The evolution allowed the boathouse to be placed in a location convenient to launching a boat while the living quarters or station house could be placed in a more protected location. Having the rescue apparatus in its own building also allowed for increased ventilation to dry out the equipment.

The Fort Point-type station house was a symmetrically-planned, gambrel-roofed structure with three prominent dormers. This station type is described thoroughly in Chapter V. The Fort Point-type marked a return to the symmetrical building seen exclusively before Bibb's arrival. In its symmetry, gambrel roof and front door detailing, the style is nodding to the Colonial Revival.

Bibb's last design was the Marquette-type station of which 13 were known to be built. Four of these were built in Oregon, making it the most common Life-Saving Service station type on the Oregon Coast (Figure 36). The Marquette-type was also the first foray into a standard, nationwide architecture, as it was used on the Pacific, Atlantic, and the Great Lakes. Like the Fort Point-type station, the Marquette-type station plan separated the rescue equipment from the living quarters. This type was particularly well-suited for the Oregon Coast where lifeboats were launched directly into the water. The dwelling or station house was symmetrical and rectangular in plan, 50' wide by 30' deep. It was 1-1/2 stories tall and built on wooden piles. The dwelling was clad in horizontal drop siding with wood shingles in the gables. Two large, gabled dormers marked the



Figure 36. Marquette-Type Dwelling and Fort Point-Type Boathouse at Umpqua River Life-Saving Station (Bibb, 1890) in 1923. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Umpqua River File).

front and rear porches. The roof was surfaced with wood shingles. A simple king post in the gable ends was the only elaboration.

The Marquette-type station house was divided by a central hallway and stair with the right half reserved for the keeper and the left half for the crew (Figure 37). On the main floor, the keeper's living room, office, kitchen and pantry were to the right. On the left were the crew's quarters and mess room. Upstairs, the right half contained the bedrooms for the keeper and his family. On the left was the crew's locker room. There was no bathroom within the station house, though there was a bath house included on the grounds. At the Yaquina Bay Life-Saving Station, the crew's quarters became the crew's kitchen, and the crew's locker room became their quarters. It must be kept in mind that

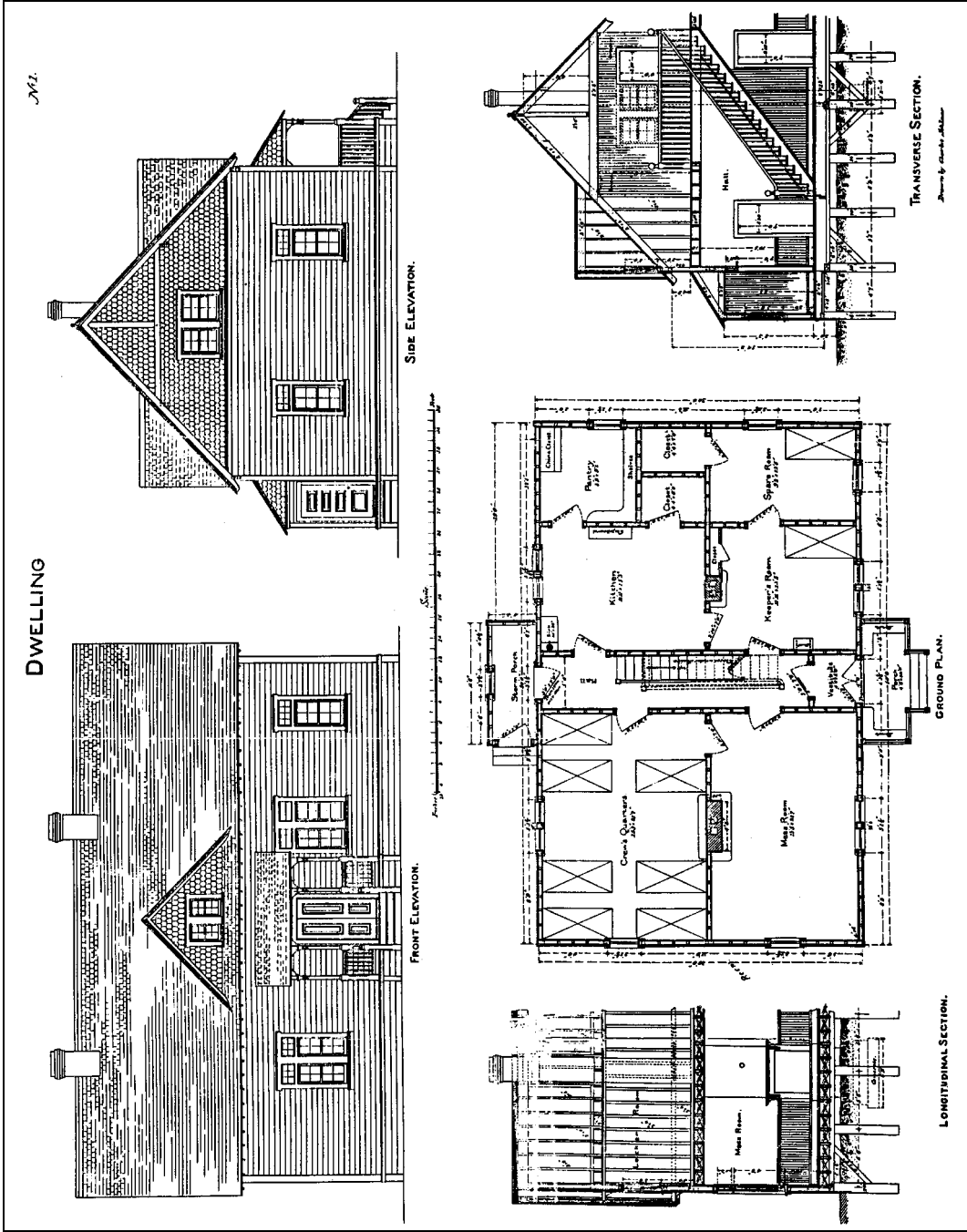


Figure 37. Marquette-Type Dwelling Plans. Source: Wick York.

the stations were often altered to suit the keeper's needs and that no two stations were identical, only similar.

The Marquette-type station continued the new concept of separating the boathouse from the living quarters. All but two of the Marquette stations were built on the Great Lakes and Pacific Coast, suggesting that an integrated boathouse was preferred only on the East Coast. The standard Fort Point-type boathouse plan was recycled and used at all of the Marquette-type stations in Oregon. The boathouse was one story and rectangular in plan, 24' wide by 40' deep (Figure 38). The structure was built on piles and capped by a hip roof. The distinctive feature of a Fort Point boathouse was its "witch's hat" ventilator named for its trademark shape. Allowing in light and increasing the ventilation of the area were two sets of paired, double-hung windows on either side of the boathouse. Paired double doors on the front each led to a bay on the inside, one bay containing a surfboat and the other a lifeboat. The rafters were used to hang equipment such as the lifecar and breeches buoy. A small workbench was situated at the back next to the rear doors. With the beach apparatus cart parked in the bay with the surfboat, the space was fairly cramped (Figure 39).

Bibb left the Service and was succeeded by George Russell Tolman in 1891. Tolman continued with Bibb's Shingle style and produced what has become known as the Quonochontaug-type station in 1892. This plan returned to the concept of combining the boathouse and dwelling into one unit. Twenty-one of these stations were built, though only on the East Coast, lending credence to the idea that the East Coast preferred

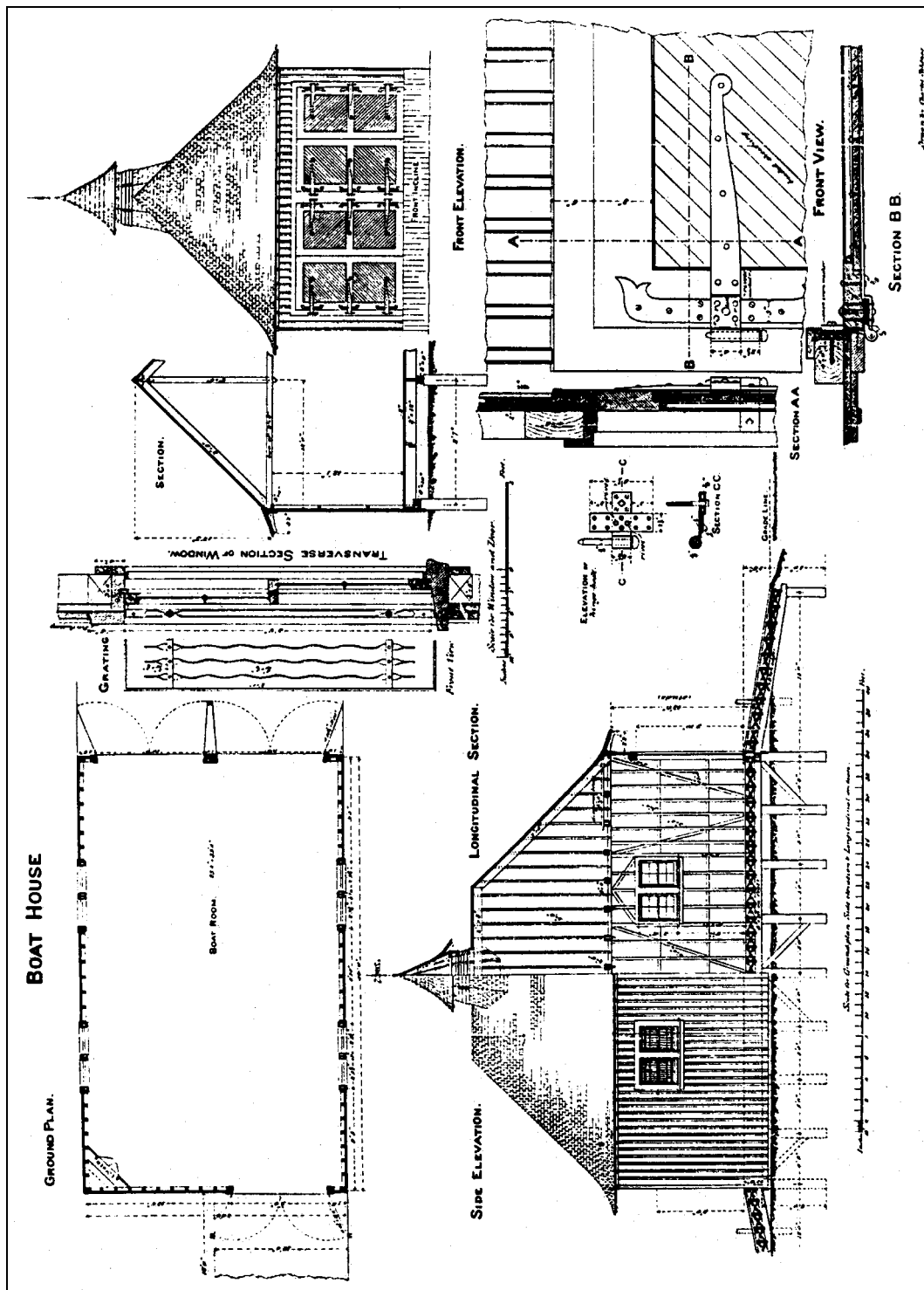


Figure 38. Fort Point-Type Boathouse Plans. Source: Nautical Research Centre (#3-451).



Figure 39. Boathouse Interior, Umpqua River Life-Saving Station, Circa 1900. Source: Lincoln County Historical Society (LCHS #355).

combined buildings and the Great Lakes and Pacific Coast liked their dwellings separate from the rescue boats.

Tolman continued to design in the Shingle style, producing two more designs, the Niagara-type and the Duluth-type, and a sole one-of-a-kind station. The Niagara was similar to the Quonochontaug, but the Duluth departed from the norm and provided a large lookout tower (Figure 40). At least 54 of Tolman's station designs were built, plus a modified version of his Quonochontaug plan was constructed for the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893.

Victor Mendleheff was Tolman's successor in 1898. Mendleheff was the most prolific of the Life-Saving Service architects, producing 13 known designs and working



Figure 40. Avalon Life-Saving Station (Tolman, 1894) in New Jersey. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Life-Saving Service: Stations and Architecture File).

for the Service the longest.⁷⁷ Mendleheff started out by designing the Petersons Point-type station, one of which was built on Tillamook Bay, Oregon, at Barview. The station was a gambrel-roof structure, like the Fort Point-type station, but it was much squatter and less symmetrical with an integral porch (Figure 41). It had three dormers, again like the Fort Point-type, but the center one was three-sided to form a diminutive lookout tower. The 1-1/2 story station was sheathed in shingles. Detailing was Colonial Revival with Tuscan columns and lunette windows in the gables. The boathouse was detached. Chapter IX describes the Tillamook Bay Life-Saving Station in detail.

⁷⁷Shanks, *The U.S. Life-Saving Service*, 237.



Figure 41. Tillamook Bay Life-Saving Station (Mendleheff, 1908) at Barview, Oregon, Circa 1913. Source: Author's Collection.

Mendleheff continued the Colonial Revival detailing and shingle surfaces through the rest of his 13 designs. He switched to a gable roof but continued with the dormers. The miniature tower of the Petersons Point-type station ballooned to a full-scale tower similar to the Duluth-type stations of Tolman. His stations over the next 17 years varied in form somewhat but retained the same 1-1/2 story massing with tower.

Mendleheff's last design for the Life-Saving Service was the Chatham-type station in 1914. The station marked a sudden departure from the one-and-one-half story stations that had been the hallmark of the Life-Saving Service and brought the station to a full two stories in height. This departure aligns with the decade by decade trend of giving the crew more livable space. The Chatham-type was used on both East and West Coasts marking the first time since the Marquette-type stations of a standard, nationwide

architecture. The two-story Chatham design cast a new mold that was to dominate Coast Guard architecture through the 1940s.

At least 30 of the Chatham-type stations were built, one of which was the Siuslaw River Lifeboat Station (1917) at Florence, Oregon. The station house was symmetrical, 44' wide and 24' deep, clad in shingles, with a hipped gable roof (Figure 42). The roof was frequently surmounted by an integrated lookout tower harkening back to the designs of Chandler in the mid-1870s. The boathouse was detached and enlarged to accommodate the evolution to the larger motor lifeboats and their associated equipment. The Siuslaw River Lifeboat Station is described thoroughly in Chapter X.

On 28 January 1915, the Life-Saving Service merged with the Revenue Cutter Service to form the Coast Guard. An all-time high of 279 stations were active at the changeover. It is believed that Mendleheff continued on as architect through the transition period to the Coast Guard.⁷⁸ Variations on the Chatham-type station continued to be built through the 1930s.⁷⁹ In 1936, the Port Orford Lifeboat Station was built on a variant of the Chatham plans (Figure 43). The station featured a simpler hipped roof, no cupola, and a dormer on the front and back of the building. It also featured a wider front porch. The Port Orford Lifeboat Station is described in detail in Chapter XI.

The Siuslaw River Lifeboat Station (1917) and the Port Orford Lifeboat Station (1936) represent the two ends of the evolution of the Chatham-type station. From the mid-1930s through World War II, a station type known as the Roosevelt-type station,

⁷⁸Ibid., 241.

⁷⁹Wick York, phone interview by author, transcript, Eugene, OR, 8 April 2000.



Figure 42. Siuslaw River Lifeboat Station (Mendleheff, 1917) at Florence, Oregon. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Siuslaw River File).



Figure 43. Port Orford Lifeboat Station (1934), Station House, in 1996. Source: Author.

dubbed for Franklin D. Roosevelt's tenure as President, was developed by the Coast Guard. Some of these stations were built with funds from Roosevelt's New Deal programs, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA).⁸⁰

The Roosevelt-type station is a direct descendent of the Chatham-type. Under a skin of Colonial Revival detailing, the Roosevelt-type station is very similar to the Chatham-type. Unlike the balanced facade of the Chatham-type, the front elevation of the Roosevelt-type station was completely symmetrical, right down to the two, one-story wings added to both sides of the building. Colonial Revival detailing was represented by multi-pane windows flanked by operable shutters, large corner boards with capitals, Tuscan columns, eave returns, a water table with cap, and metal railings in Classical motifs. Even the restricted roof of the entry porch was rimmed with a balustrade. It was always painted white with green shutters and a red roof.

The hipped roof of the Chatham was replaced with a gable roof, and like the Chatham, the Roosevelt-type station was frequently topped with a lookout tower. Six small dormers, with arched windows, pierced the attic providing even more livable space. Under the building was a full basement used for mechanical systems and storage. The Roosevelt-type station completed the evolutionary trend of increasing livable space for the crew. The building was a commodious 80' wide and 32' deep, designed to sleep 17

⁸⁰Dorothy S. Wilkinson, "Facts Available for Preservation and Study of U.S. Coast Guard mid-1930's era Roosevelt-type Lifeboat Stations," *Wreck & Rescue* 12 (Fall 1999): 24.

but able to accommodate more. The station was the apex of square footage with the most livable space of any of the pre-WWII standard station designs.

A total of four Roosevelt-type stations were built in Oregon, making it as prolific in Oregon as the Marquette-type of the Life-Saving Service era. At Point Adams, Oregon, there is an early Roosevelt-type station from 1938 (Figure 44). Generally, the construction dates for the Roosevelt-type stations fall within the Franklin Roosevelt's presidency (1933-45). However, at Yaquina Bay, Oregon, the station was built in 1949. The Yaquina Bay Lifeboat Station is considered one of the last Roosevelt-type stations in the nation.⁸¹

World War II expanded the number of Coast Guard structures exponentially and hurriedly. This provides a convenient cutoff date for this thesis, as properties underwent expansion in a functional, wartime state, contrasting with the much more thoughtful and detailed designs prior to WWII. Table 1 gives an overview of the stations in Oregon designed before this period of expansion. After WWII, station development continued with the purely functional designs not seen since the Red Houses of 1871-72. Cost of construction and the wave of International Modernism held the elaboration and ornamentation of the designs in check. There has been a modest resurgence of the Roosevelt-type stations with the construction of several simplified versions in the South in an attempt to replicate the Colonial Revival style not seen since WWII.⁸² However, there is and never will be a substitute for the original stations.

⁸¹Ralph Shanks, phone interview by author, transcript, Eugene, OR, 8 May 2000.

⁸²Ibid.



Figure 44. Point Adams Lifeboat Station (1939), Station House, in 1997. Source: Author.

Table 1. Each Oregon Station by Date Activated with Year Constructed and Architectural Style.

Station	When Station Activated	Year Construction Began	Architectural Style
Cape Arago LBS	January 1879	1878	Modified 1875-Type
Point Adams LSS	December 1889	1889	Fort Point
Coquille River LSS	Early 1891	1890	Marquette
Coos Bay LSS	August 1891	1890	Marquette
Umpqua River LSS	September 1891	1890	Marquette
Yaquina Bay LSS	April 1896	1895	Marquette
Yaquina Bay LSS	August 1906	1871	Lighthouse
Tillamook Bay LSS	May 1908	1907	Petersons Point
Coos Bay LBS	September 1916	1915	One-of-a-Kind
Siuslaw River LBS	March 1918	1917	Chatham
Yaquina Bay LBS	April 1932	1931	One-of-a-Kind
Port Orford LBS	July 1934	1933	Chatham
Point Adams LBS	April 1939	1938	Roosevelt
Umpqua River LBS	Late 1939	1939	Roosevelt
Coquille River LBS	January 1940	1939	One-of-a-Kind
Tillamook Bay LBS	January 1943	1942	Roosevelt
Yaquina Bay LBS	December 1949	1949	Roosevelt