

IR Lifesaving Station to host reenactment of storm rescue

Bob Trapani has a passion. Not for fancy cars. Not for treasured antiques or a professional football team. His passion is for the sea and the men whom he calls "true heroes" of their day.

Trapani and his team from the Indian River Life Saving Station will demonstrate the heroism of the surfmen of the Indian River Life Saving Station during the notorious storm of the winter of '88 and their heroics in another dramatic rescue in 1902 at the Friday, Jan. 17, meeting of the Lewes Historical Society. The meeting at St. Peter's Parish Hall on Mulberry Street in Lewes begins at 7:30 p.m.

For the past nearly three years Lewes resident Trapani has been executive director of the Indian

River Life Saving Station on Route One, just north of the Indian River Inlet. Restored in 1997 as a maritime museum, the Station annually attracts upwards of 50,000 visitors. To convey the heroism of the people who served at the station, Trapani, with his museum interpreters, initiated a series of reenactments based on the daily logs of the Station's keepers to demonstrate the duties and skills of these hardy individuals.

"The Life Saving Service in the 19th century and the first part of the 20th represents the best in humanitarian spirit," he said. "They were community guardians who risked life and limb to rescue not only shipwreck victims, but

Continued on page 67

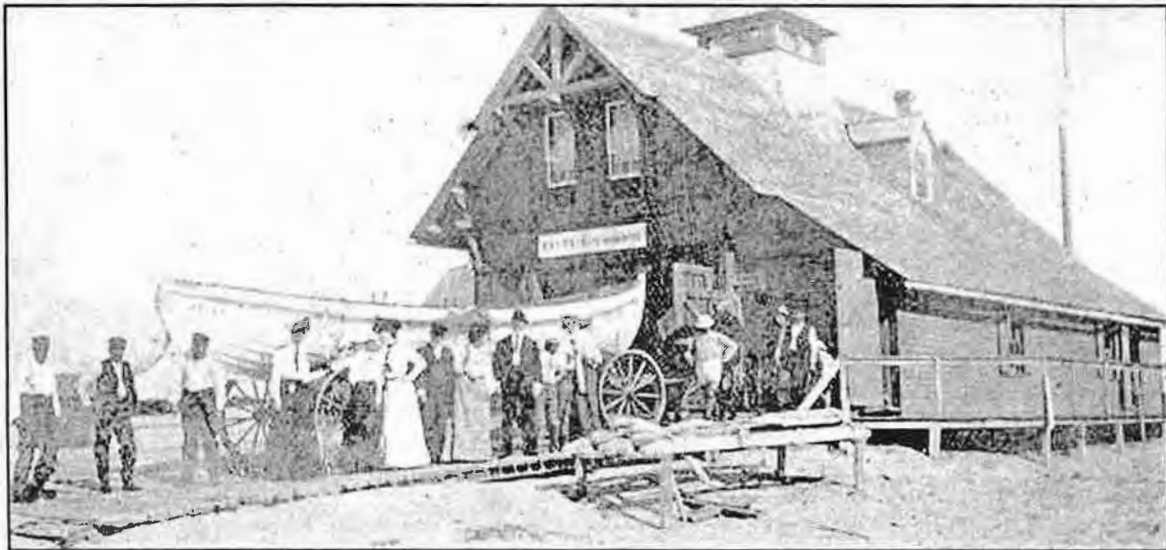


Photo courtesy of the Collections of the Lewes Historical Society

The Cape Henlopen Life Saving Station was located about a mile from the Cape Henlopen Light. Shown are surfmen and their families and friends apparently on a visit. Usually such visits took place on the weekend (Sunday), when some of the crew had the day off.

Rescue

Continued from page 65

they also answered calls to fight fires on land, to assist fishermen in peril and to aid anyone in distress along the Delaware Coast. Their service motto which guided them was 'You have to go out, but you don't have to come back' says it all."

The Indian River Life Saving Station, erected in 1876, has the distinction of being the only one still standing on its original site. "There were six stations along the Delaware coast: Lewes, Cape Henlopen, Rehoboth, Indian River, Bethany and Fenwick Island," Trapani said. "They were located about five miles apart. Each was staffed by a keeper and six surfmen who were paid \$40 a month." According to Trapani, who also is president of the Delaware River and Bay Lighthouse Foundation, the surfmen were the first civil service employees and precursors to the United States Coast Guard founded in 1915."

"Every day these hardy men - local farmers, mechanics, watermen and the like- would trod the sandy shoreline's five-mile circuit on four-hour shifts from dusk to dawn September though May

keeping their eyes fixed on the sea," he said. "During the day they constantly performed rescue drills, practiced communication techniques with flags and flares and honed their skills at knot tying, boat handling and other related activities."

The Historical Society meeting will feature Trapani, Bruce and Karen Donovan and Barney Barnhill who serve as interpreters at the Indian River Life Saving Station. It will be their first reenactment performance away from the Life Saving Station. Barnhill will portray Keeper Washington Vickers a Seaford native who served at the station from 1883 to 1907. The keeper was the only full-time, year round position. Barnhill will give a first-person account of the great blizzard of 1888 and the rescue efforts which engaged all four of the stations from Lewes to Indian River. Also, he will tell of the shipwreck of the American schooner Anna Murray which was stranded during a northerly gale at 5:30 a.m. on February 17, 1902 off Cotton Patch Hills, 22 miles south of the Indian River Station. He and his surfmen braved heavy shore ice and severe weather and sea conditions to rescue the ship's 10-man crew and their personal effects.

Trapani will bring several items used by the surfmen in their res-

cue efforts - a Lyle gun which was fired a breeches buoy line to rescue shipwreck victims, lanterns and signal flags and other apparatus used by the men- to add a sense of realism to the presentation. Also, brochures about the museum will be distributed. The book "Journey Along the Sands" published by the Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation and authored by Trapani, will be available for purchase.

The meeting begins at a new time: 7:30 p.m. It is free and the public is cordially invited to attend. Refreshments will be served following the presentation. For information contact the Lewes Historical Society at 645-7670.





INDIAN RIVER LIFE-SAVING STATION

With the expansion of the nation's maritime commerce following the Civil War, the need for improved methods of sending ships to distress was apparent. In 1816, by the United States Life-Saving Service, the Indian River Life-Saving Station was part of a network of 160 stations which were constructed along the Atlantic coast. In 1916, the Life-Saving Service and Revenue Cutter Service were merged to form the United States Coast Guard. The Coast Guard continued to operate the Indian River Station until it was decommissioned following a devastating tropical storm in 1962. The property was later transferred to the State of Florida. For a time the station was utilized as a maintenance facility by the state's transportation and natural resources agencies. In 1997, the facility was extensively renovated and reopened in its 1916 appearance. It is now operated by the Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation in partnership with the State of Delaware.

The Indian River Life-Saving Station was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1994.

Delaware Public Act 2001 - 2001 SC-148

Wave photo by Alicia Mason

A HISTORICAL EVENT — Sen. George Bunting (left) and Clinton Bunting at the Monday, Oct. 28 presentation of a historical marker at the Indian River Life-Saving Station.



INDIAN RIVER LIFE SAVING STATION

130 Coastal Highway, Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971
- 302-227-0478 -



**History
of Station**

History of the Indian River Life Saving Station

**The
Foundation**

The Indian River Life Saving Station was originally built in 1876. The building and site are on the National Register of Historic Places. The Indian River Station was one of the six built along Delaware's barren coast to help shipwreck victims. This is the only station still residing on its original site.

**Getting
Involved**

**Museum
Store**

Construction was began on January 17, 1876 and completed just two months later for an estimated \$2,400.00



E-Mail Us

Home

Conditions were hard and equipment was primitive and many of the men gave up much of their family life for a pay of \$1.33 per day. Daily life as a surfman was usually tedious and mundane.

Much hard work had to be done for the upkeep of the station and its equipment.

Weekly drills helped men stay in good physical shape and kept them sharp in the use of the life saving gear. All of this hard work went unappreciated, until the dreaded cry came, "SHIP ASHORE"!

They were some of the greatest unsung heroes of the Delmarva Coast. They routinely risked their lives in coastal rescues in a time when our waterways were our highways. When our coastline was still a desolate, lonely place, they were sailors and passengers only help in what might become their hour of greatest need.

These were the men of the Indian River Life Saving Station.

The station was an active United States Life Saving Station from 1876 until 1915. In that year, the USLSS and the US Treasury Marine Service merged to form the modern day Coast Guard. The Indian River Station continued to serve proudly until 1962.

After the devastating storm of 1962, and keeping watch over the coast for nearly 86 years, the building and grounds were transferred from the federal government to the state of Delaware.

The Indian River Life Saving Station has been restored back to its turn of the century appearance by the Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation. Today, she proudly stands, on her original site, showing her original colors of orange and deep burgandy, as a testimony to the brave men of the United States Life Saving Service and the United States Coast Guard.

[IRLSS Home](#) | [The Foundation](#) | [Getting Involved](#)
[Museum Store](#) | [E-Mail Us](#)

GEORGE H. BUNTING, JR.
STATE SENATOR
Twentieth District



SENATE
STATE OF DELAWARE
LEGISLATIVE HALL
DOVER, DELAWARE 19903

COMMITTEES
Agriculture, Chair
Administrative Services
Natural Resources &
Environmental Control
Small Business
Sunset

May 25, 2000

Mr. Russell McCabe
Delaware Public Archives
Hall of Records
121 Duke of York Street, Suite 2
Dover, DE 19901
D575A

Dear Russell,

Please find enclosed a copy of a letter I received from Mr. Edward Henifin of Fenwick Island regarding the need for a historical marker for the Indian River Life Saving Station. By means of this letter, I am requesting a historical marker for this site.

If there is anything further I can do to help assist you with this request, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George Bunting".

George H. Bunting, Jr.
State Senator
20th District

Enclosure

GHB/cb

March 20, 2000

Senator George Bunting Jr.
P. O. Box 1497
Bethany Beach, DE 19930

Dear Senator Bunting,

About a year ago I saw an article in the Wilmington *The News Journal* concerning historical markers throughout Delaware. The sites where these markers are located describe a significant event in the history of Delaware. I have found these markers to be educational and interesting. Whenever I drive the byways of our State I will stop to read the signs.

The Indian River Life Saving Station on Delaware Rt. 1 North of the Indian River Inlet has a drab brown sign indicating that there is a museum and historic site a mile or two up the road. However when you get to the museum it is necessary to go inside to find information about the Life Saving Station and the brave men that stood and walked their watches, responded to ships in dire straits, and saved many, many seamen and passengers from those ships. The restored station should have its own historical marker.

Senator, I ask that you request Delaware Public Archives, Historical Markers Program, develop and install a Delaware Historical Marker at the Indian River Life Saving Station.

Thank you, for your kind attention.

Sincerely yours,


Edward E. (Buzz) Henifin

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

MAR 25 1976

DATE ENTERED

SEP 29 1976

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

*

Indian River Life Saving Service Station

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

On State Route 14, north of Indian River NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Bethany Beach

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

One

STATE

Delaware

CODE

10

COUNTY

Sussex

CODE

002

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY**

DISTRICT
 BUILDING(S)
 STRUCTURE
 SITE
 OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC
 PRIVATE
 BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS
 BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED
 UNOCCUPIED
 WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
 YES: RESTRICTED
 YES: UNRESTRICTED
 NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE MUSEUM
 COMMERCIAL PARK
 EDUCATIONAL PRIVATE RESIDENCE
 ENTERTAINMENT RELIGIOUS
 GOVERNMENT SCIENTIFIC
 INDUSTRIAL TRANSPORTATION
 MILITARY OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

State of Delaware, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Dover

VICINITY OF

STATE

Delaware

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Recorder of Deeds for Sussex County

STREET & NUMBER

Court House, The Circle

CITY, TOWN

Georgetown

STATE

Delaware

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Survey of Delaware Historic Sites & Buildings

DATE

1976

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Hall of Records

CITY, TOWN

Dover

STATE

Delaware

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Indian River Life Saving Station is one of a series of such stations designed by the Federal government in 1874, the plans for which have survived. The original portion is a board-and-batten frame structure, one-and-a-half-stories high with wide overhanging eaves. A shed-roofed wing on the back and a porch on the front have obscured much of the original ornate bracketing of the roof. A clipped gable, shown on the 1874 plans, is not present. The lookout cupola on the roof, present on the building, does not appear in the plans.

A mile to the south stood a separate boat house. There were originally five outbuildings on the main station: a feed house, a barn, a stable, a meat house, and a privy. At least once during its history, the station has been moved back from the encroaching surf. Its last major encounter with the elements occurred on Ash Wednesday 1962, when a severe storm left it buried up to its first-floor windows in sand.

The first floor contained a boat room and a mess room in the original portion, with offices and communications rooms added later. Upstairs were the keeper's room and the crew's bunk room.

The station stands on pilings between the highway and the dune line, near its original site. The essential elements of the building's environment have not been altered by the fact that the building has been moved back from the surf.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1875-1882

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Indian River Life Saving Station is a relic of the days when the Delaware coast was a notorious graveyard of ships. It stands near the site of the old Indian River inlet, scene of many shipwrecks from colonial times forward. The building is one of the oldest surviving lifeboat stations on the coast.

Ships approaching Delaware Bay were forced to follow a course dangerously close to the offshore shoals south of Cape Henlopen; for this reason, the Delaware coast claimed a large number of ships in storms. An early move to improve the situation was the erection of the first Cape Henlopen lighthouse by Philadelphia merchants in 1765. The actual saving of lives was left to private enterprise. Farmers along the shore would rally to shipwrecks to scavenge whatever washed ashore and to rescue survivors. The United States Life Saving Service, now a part of the Coast Guard, eventually was established to provide regular rescue services on the beaches. Patrols would walk the beach or scan the shore from lookout towers. If a ship in distress were sighted, a lifeboat would put out from the station or a subsidiary boat house.

The Life Saving Service was created in 1872, to supplant the various private organizations that had existed along the coasts since the eighteenth century. The service advertised for bids for the station in 1875, but according to Coast Guard records it was not commissioned until 1880.

According to one account, the Indian River Station opened in 1875, under the command of Captain Washington Vickers. Indian River was the southern station in a series of four that extended to Lewes. By 1882, the four stations were in operation with constant patrols.

After the 1962 March storm, it was vacated by the Coast Guard crew, who moved to temporary facilities. In 1964, a new station on another site was opened. The property has since served as a state maintenance facility.

Although shipboard wireless equipment made the walking patrols obsolete, surf-boats continued to be the principal rescue craft until after World War II. They still remain, but larger cutters and aircraft provide most of the rescue services.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Lenik, Edward J. "The Truro Halfway House, Cape Cod, Massachusetts," Historical Archaeology 1972, pp. 77-86.
 National Archives and Records Service, record group 26.
 Scharf, J. Thomas. History of Delaware 1609-1888. Philadelphia: L. J. Richards Company, 1888.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	4,9,4	1,2,5	4,2,7,5	9,1,0	B					
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING	
C						D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE

Edward F. Heite, Historic Registrar

ORGANIZATION

Div. of Historical & Cultural Affairs

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

Hall of Records

TELEPHONE

302-678-4564

CITY OR TOWN

Dover

STATE

Delaware

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Lauren [Signature]

TITLE: Director, Div. of Historical & Cultural Affairs

DATE

3/22/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Way [Signature]

DATE

9/29/76

ACTING DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

9/29/76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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RECEIVED AUG 20 1976
DATE ENTERED 8/23/76

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

The original outbuildings do not survive on the property. Modern service buildings now stand nearby, as part of a park maintenance facility.

CHRONOLOGY:

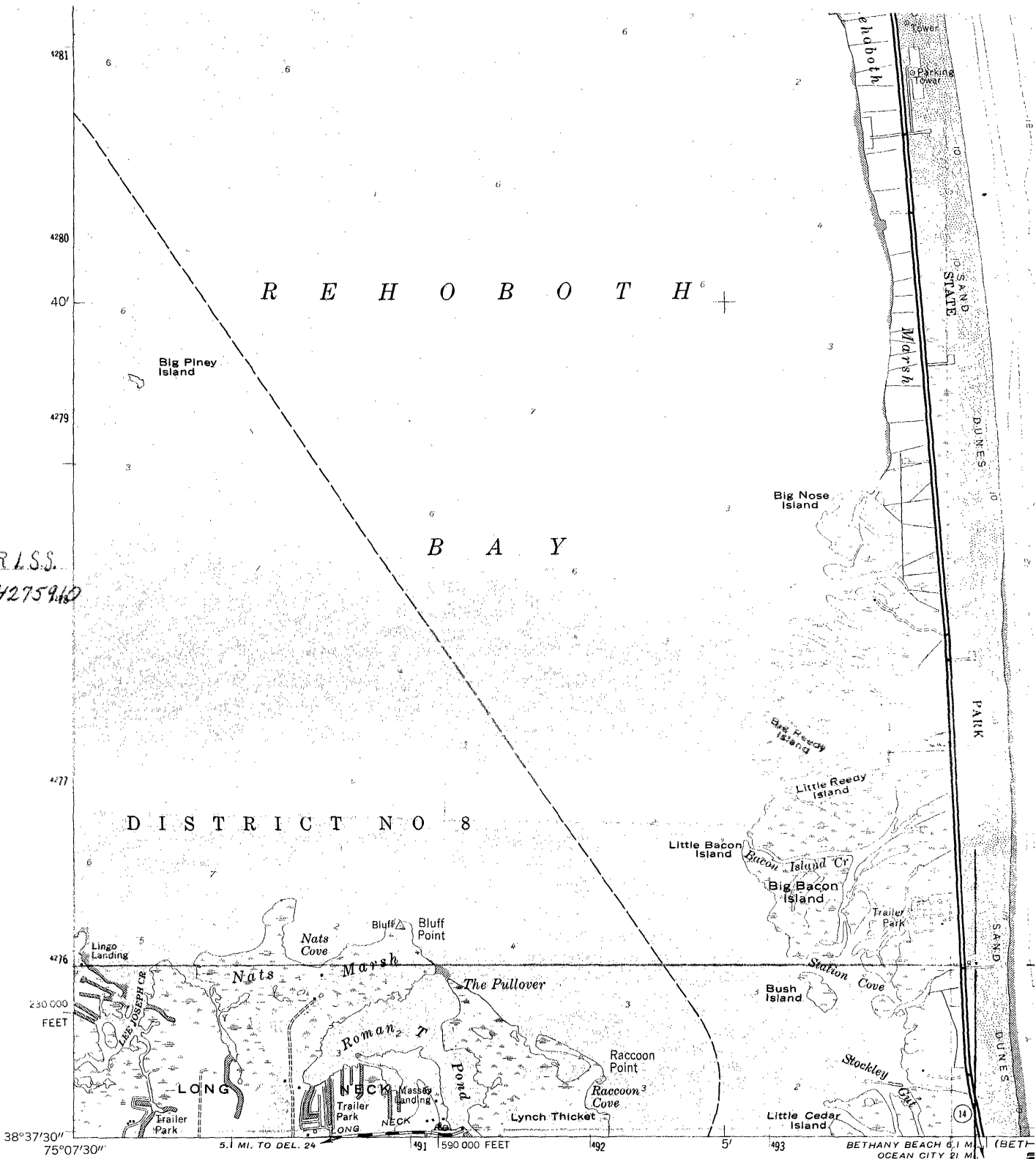
- 1872: Life-Saving Service established by Congress.
- 1874: Plans drawn.

- 1875: Federal Government advertised for bids.
- 1875: According to one contemporary source, Indian River Station was manned at this time.

- 1880: Coast Guard records state the station was commissioned in this year.
- 1882: The full complement of four stations was operational.
- 1885: Date of drawings for Cape Henlopen and Indian River Stations, probably for alterations.

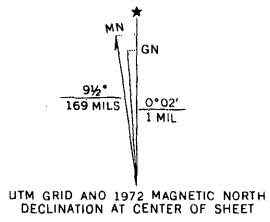
- 1962: Storm caused abandonment of stations.
- 1964: New station built by Coast Guard.

INDIAN RIVER L.S.S.
8/494125/4275910

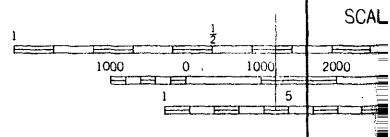


Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and USCE
Culture and drainage in part compiled by Corps of Engineers,
Dept. of the Army, from aerial photographs taken 1943
Topography by planetable surveys (1954)
Hydrography from USC&GS chart 1219, dated 1954

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Delaware coordinate system
Red tint indicates area in which only
landmark buildings are shown
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
line 18, shown in blue

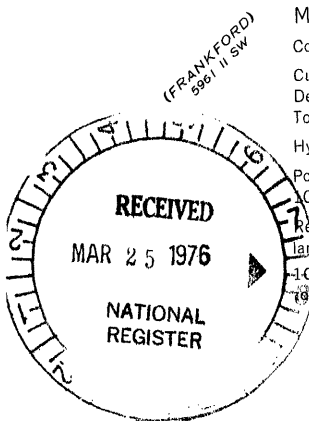


Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs
taken 1972. This information not field checked
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas



CONTOUR DATUM IS SOUNDING
DEPTH CURVES AND SHORELINE SHOWS REPRESENTS THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE AND 4 FEET

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

MAR 25 1976

DATE ENTERED

SEP 29 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

Indian River Life Saving Service Station

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Bethany Beach

VICINITY OF

STATE Delaware

COUNTY Sussex

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Edward F. Heite

DATE OF PHOTO 1976

NEGATIVE FILED AT Hall of Records, Dover, Delaware

19901

NOTIFICATION

VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT. GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

levation, from the West.

PHOTO NO. 1072

DE 6



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

MAR 25 1976

DATE ENTERED

SEP 29 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

Indian River Life Saving Service Station

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Bethany Beach

~~X~~ VICINITY OF

STATE Delaware

COUNTY Sussex

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Edward F. Heite

DATE OF PHOTO 1976

NEGATIVE FILED AT Hall of Records, Dover, Delaware 19901

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

PHOTO NO. 272

South elevation, from the South.