

U.S. COAST GUARD CAPE COD CANAL STATION
Off Coast Guard Road, about 1 mile north of the
intersection of Coast Guard Road and U.S. Route 6A
Sandwich
Barnstable County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1266

HABS
MASS
1-SAND,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
U.S. COAST GUARD CAPE COD CANAL STATION

HABS No. MA-1266

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MASS
1-SAND,
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Location: Off Coast Guard Road, approximately 1 mile north of the intersection of Coast Guard Road and U.S. Route 6A, 2 miles north of the Sagamore Bridge, in proximity to the Cape Cod Canal, in Sandwich, Barnstable County, Massachusetts

USGS Sagamore, MA Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
19.375240.4625300

Present Owner: United States Department of Transportation
United States Coast Guard
2100 Second Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20593-0001

Present Occupant: United States Coast Guard

Present Use: United States Coast Guard Station

Significance: The Cape Cod Canal Station consists of three Colonial Revival, wood-framed buildings: a 2-1/2 story station house, a 1-1/2 story boathouse, and a 1-1/2 story garage/equipment building. The station house, boathouse and equipment buildings were constructed as a support complex for the activities of the live-saving station following the demolition of the original facility at a site nearby with the widening of the Cape Cod Canal in 1936. The new facility provided space for the central administrative and social support functions of the station following a standard Colonial Revival-styled module employed elsewhere by the Coast Guard for similar facilities during the period. Similar-styled U.S. Coast Guard station complexes, built under federal New Deal WPA/PWA initiatives during the 1935-37 period, exist in the New England coastal region.

Historical Information:

Construction of a Coast Guard life-saving station at the eastern end of the Cape Cod Canal was determined by the construction of the canal between 1909-1914 and the canal's subsequent enlargement and widening between 1935-37. The original station was constructed in or before 1920 and located on the canal bank. Improvements to the canal made during the 1935-37 period necessitated the demolition of the original station and the building of a new station house in its present form and location.

Built to assist the safe passage of shipping between New York City and Boston, the Cape Cod Canal became a favored alternative travel route to the treacherous shoals off Cape Cod and Nantucket. Location of a life-saving station at the Cape Cod Bay entrance afforded timely assistance and policing of ship and recreational boating traffic not only for the canal but for the western end of Cape Cod Bay as well.

The station complex was enlarged during World War II, including the construction of barracks halls, enlargement of the equipment building and additional observation tower space (watch house).

During World War II, the Cape Cod Canal became a primary safe shipping route along the coast. The Buzzard's Bay end of the canal was used to coordinate the assembling of convoys of vessels, both merchantmen and war supply ships. The protected area south of the Cleveland Ledge Light became filled with ships having arrived at this anchorage on their own from points south along the coast to await the formation of convoys. These ships would then traverse the canal in single file and be escorted as convoys up the coast to Halifax or directly across the Atlantic to Great Britain. As many as eighty ships would be organized into convoys. A Port Director's Office was set up in Wood's Hole to supervise convoy organization. Voyaging around the Cape, outside of the net of protection was dangerous during the War. This area was known for German U-Boat activity and several ships attempting the route were torpedoed.

The responsibility for canal operations during World War II was transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard and Navy. The principal operation headquarters was moved from the Buzzard's Bay entrance of the canal to the Coast Guard Station at Sandwich. Barracks were erected at the station to house additional personnel required for convoy escort duty. Each ship passing through the canal in convoy required two Coast Guard personnel on board while in the canal. Personnel were taken off the ships when they cleared the waterway. The station house observation tower was enlarged during this period to accommodate additional activity. During the war, the traffic load on the canal was intense. The total cargo tonnage of the three years, 1942, 1943, 1944, was 54,054,709 tons. A record use of the canal was set in 1944 with 18,851,194 tons of cargo

transported. Prewar shipping records indicate that prior to 1935 the canal routinely had over 11,000 ships traversing its waters. The canal was used by nearly 15,000 ships in 1940. It is assumed that during the War, an equal if not greater number traversed the area. In 1945 the Coast Guard and Navy returned control of the canal to the Army Corps of Engineers.

More recently (1978-81) the observation tower/watch house was essentially restored to its original exterior configuration. The barracks halls were removed prior to 1960.

Within the last decade, ownership of the boathouse has been transferred to the Army Corps of Engineers and it is now vacant. The marine launchways associated with the boathouse have been removed.

Descriptive Information:

The Cape Cod Canal Station consists of several buildings directly related to the original functional use of the facility as a lifeboat station. Dominated by a 2-1/2 story Colonial Revival station house patterned after a large residence, the facility consists of two additional buildings; a 1-1/2 story Colonial Revival boathouse, and a 1-1/2 story Colonial Revival garage/equipment building. The boathouse is situated directly on the canal. The station house and equipment building are located in close proximity approximately 200 yards inland across an access road and wide lawn. The only additional building of the complex is a small concrete block, gable-roofed paint storage building.

Architecturally, the station complex embodies the Roosevelt New Deal era public works projects utilized for rehabilitating Coast Guard facilities in the 1935-40 period elsewhere in the New England - Mid-Atlantic region. The result of this activity is the ubiquitous red-roofed, white-painted, Colonial Revival-styled, Coast Guard facility exemplified by the Cape Cod Canal Station. Similar station facilities are located at Montauk, Long Island, New York; Block Island and Point Judith, Rhode Island; Menemsha Harbor, on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts and at Eastham on Cape Cod, among others.

The design of the station house, equipment building and boathouse is derived from prototypes developed by the U.S Coast Guard and its predecessor agency, the U.S. Lifesaving Service (prior to 1915). In successive renovation and building programs, the space planning and architecture of these facilities evolved into a specialized building form for their functional use to provide round-the-clock personnel and services for saving lives efficiently during maritime disasters. The Cape Cod Station exemplifies not only the spurt of activity in rebuilding and renovating stations during the New Deal era, but also the concurrent application of the Colonial Revival

style to the design of facilities to produce an appropriate regional Coast Guard architecture. This architecture blends with the historical New England coastal village environment and yet remains identifiable as a Coast Guard facility.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS, SPECIFICATIONS AND RELATED CORRESPONDENCE

Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Judicial, Fiscal and Social Branch, Civil Archives Division, The National Archives, Washington, DC.

United States Coast Guard Civil Engineering Unit Plans and Drawings, Correspondence, in the files of the U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Unit Providence, Warwick, RI. (This archive includes a substantial number of original construction blueprints, as-builts and site plans.)

- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineers Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Plot Plan & Profile," December 12, 1935.
- U.S. Coast Guard Engineering First District, Boston, "Cape Cod Canal Lifeboat Station Road Improvements," January 1, 1944.
- U.S. Coast Guard 1st Naval District, Boston, Mass., "Cape Cod Canal LB Station, New Signal Platform & Addition to Watch House," January 8, 1945.

HISTORIC VIEWS/PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs of the United States Coast Guard Cape Cod Canal Station, Historian's Office, U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, D.C. (This archive includes a set of 19 views of the Station House and Equipment Building under construction in 1936.)

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PRIMARY AND UNPUBLISHED SOURCES:

Massachusetts Historical Commission, "MHC Inventory Form - Cape Code Canal Station," Massachusetts Historical Commission, Boston, MA, date unknown.

Weinstein, Stephen D. and John Ellis Associates, Historic Survey and Inventory of Selected Real Property Facilities, United States Coast Guard, First District, Coast Guard Station Cape Cod Canal, Sandwich, Massachusetts OPFAC #30115, New York, NY

1989.

York, Eugene V., The Architecture of the United States Life-saving Stations, a Master of Arts thesis, Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 1983.

SECONDARY AND PUBLISHED SOURCES:

Baarslag, Karl. Coast Guard to the Rescue. Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., NY, 1937.

Capron, Walter C. The U.S. Coast Guard, Franklin Watts, Inc., New York, 1965.

Craig, Lois. The Federal Presence, Architecture, Politics, and Symbolism in United States Government Building, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1978.

Farson, Robert H. The Cape Cod Canal, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT, 1977.

Powell, Hickman. What the Citizen Should Know About the Coast Guard, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1941.

Reid, William James. The Building of The Cape Cod Canal 1627-1914, privately printed, George McKibbin and Son, Inc., New York, NY, 1961.

LIKELY SOURCES NOT YET INVESTIGATED

Records of the Public Works Administration/Works Project Administration/ Federal Architecture Project in The National Archives, Washington, DC.

The following sources cited by The Massachusetts Historical Commission may yield additional information:

Cape Cod Canal Construction Co. booklet, 1925 in archives of Sandwich Public Library.

Files of the Sandwich Independent at Sandwich, MA.

Gurney, Gene. The United States Coast Guard - A Pictorial History, Crown, NY.

Records of the Civil Engineering Unit, First Coast Guard District, 150 Causeway St., Boston, MA.

Oral sources:

Mr. Benjamin Harrison, Buzzards Bay (sic)

Mr. Donald Small, Sagamore, MA

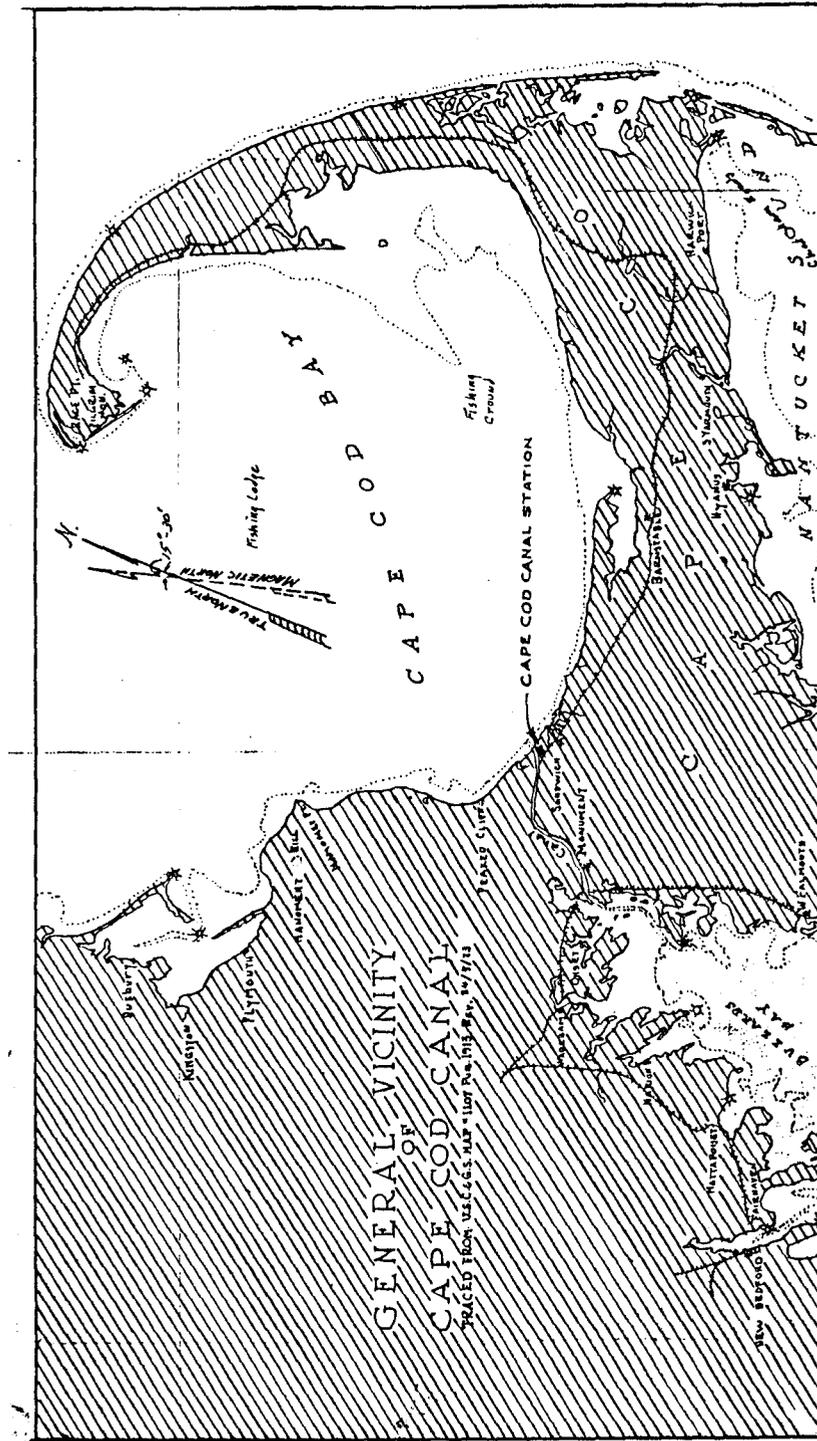
PROJECT INFORMATION

The preparation of written, graphic and photographic documentation for the station house and equipment buildings has been undertaken as mitigation, in part, for the proposed rehabilitation/new construction of these buildings to meet the demands of an expanded program. The rehabilitation project includes expansion of the existing station house building extensions (wings) and additions to the equipment building. The project will have an adverse effect on these historic resources. Mitigation was reached through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the U.S. Coast Guard, the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

The written, graphic and photo documentation was compiled in August-October 1992.

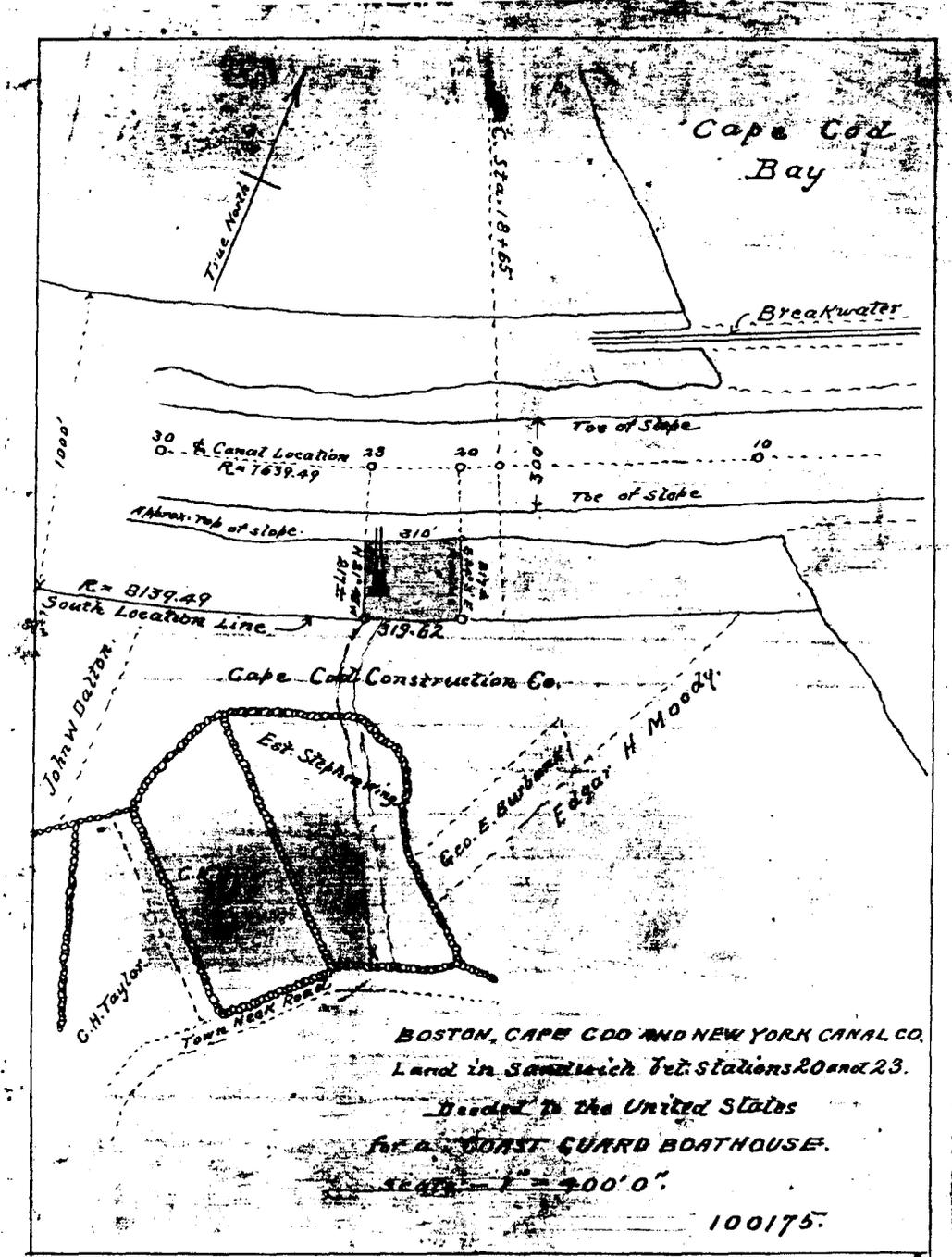
Prepared by: Richard C. Youngken
Title: Architectural Historian and Planning
Director
Affiliation: The Newport Collaborative, Inc.
Date: October 26, 1992

LOCATION PLAN



Source: U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineer's Office, Washington, DC. "Cape Cod Canal Station, Plot Plan & Profile, Third District, Mass., December 12, 1935

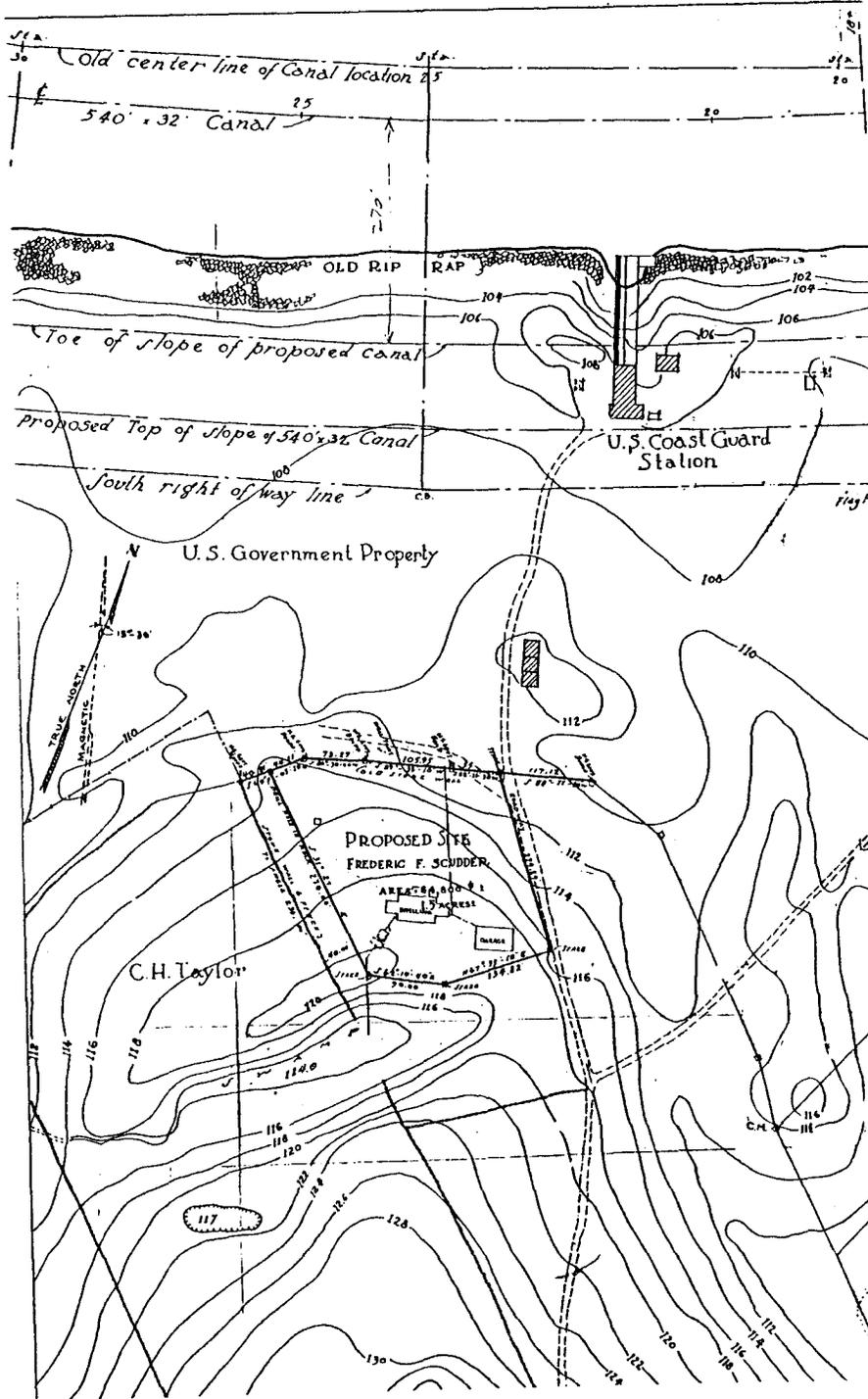
PROPERTY FEATURES CIRCA 1920



Source: Boston, Cape Cod and New York Canal Co., "Land in Sandwich Between Stations 20 & 23 Deeded to the United States for a Coast Guard Boathouse," (circa 1920).

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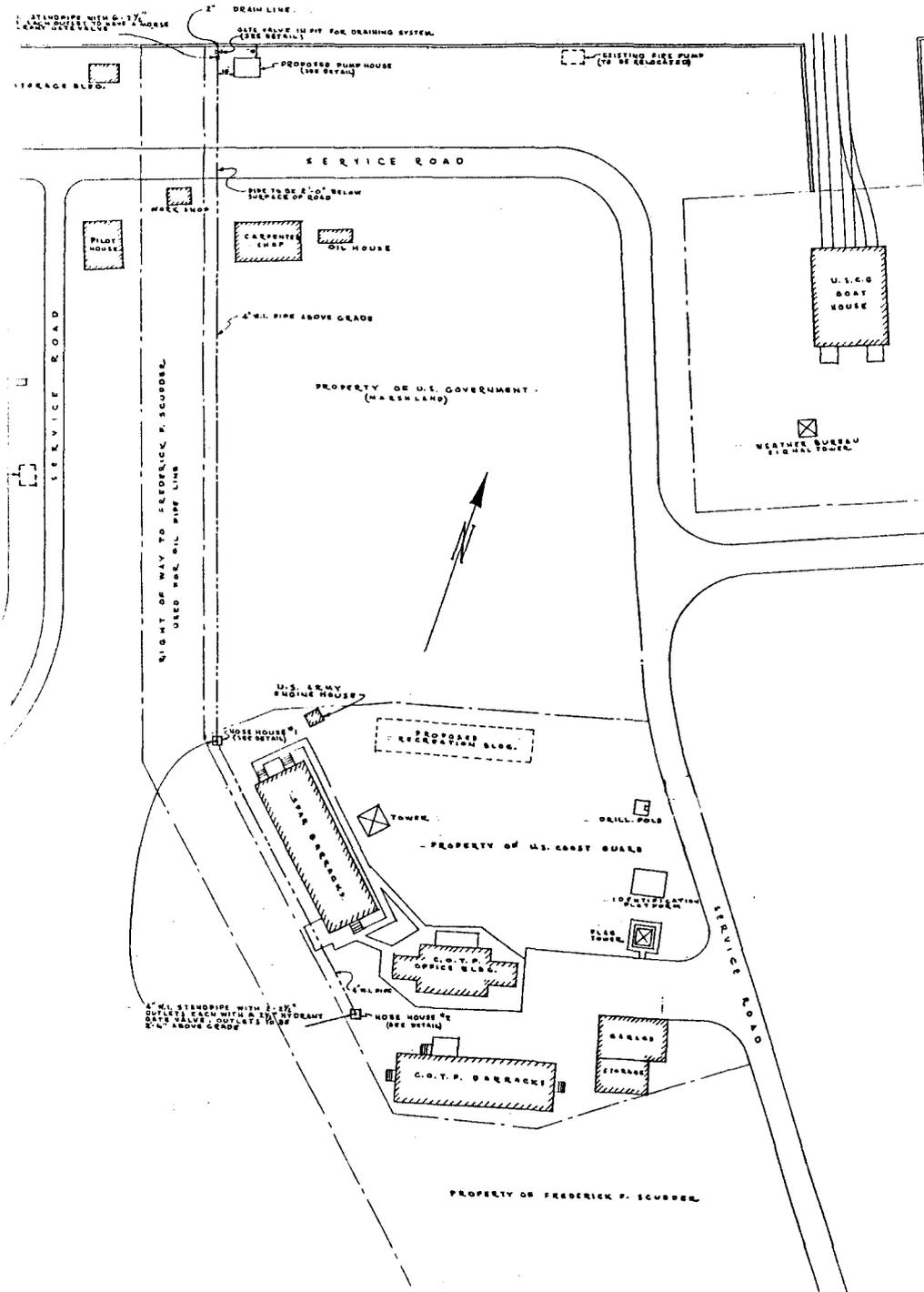
PROPERTY FEATURES 1935



Source: U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineer's Office, Washington, DC. "Cape Cod Canal Station, Plot Plan & Profile, Third District, Mass., December 12, 1935.

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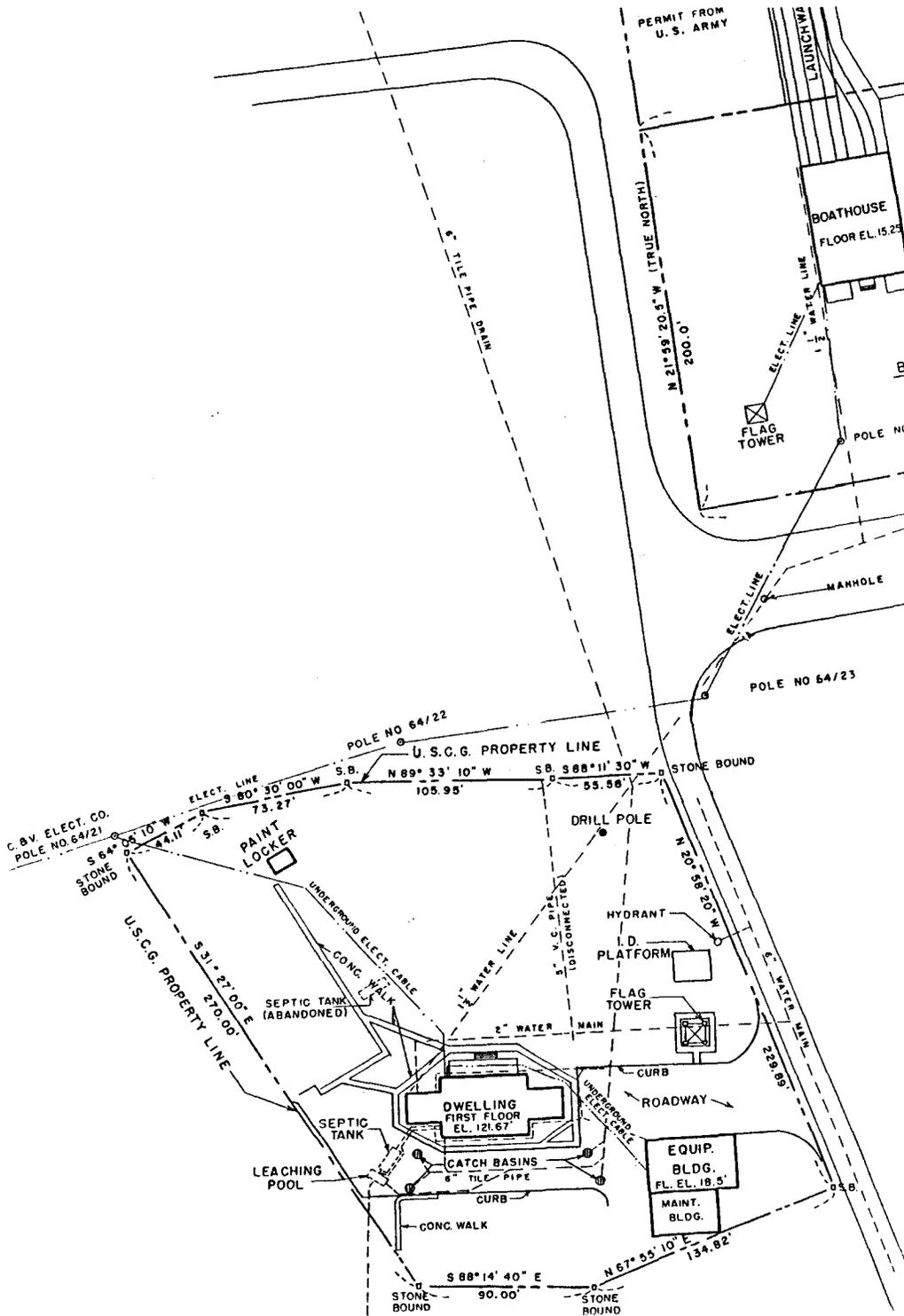
ADDITIONAL FACILITIES circa 1943: WW II BARRACKS



Source: United States Coast Guard Civil Engineering, First Naval District, Boston, Mass, "Proposed Fire Protection System," April 14, 1945.

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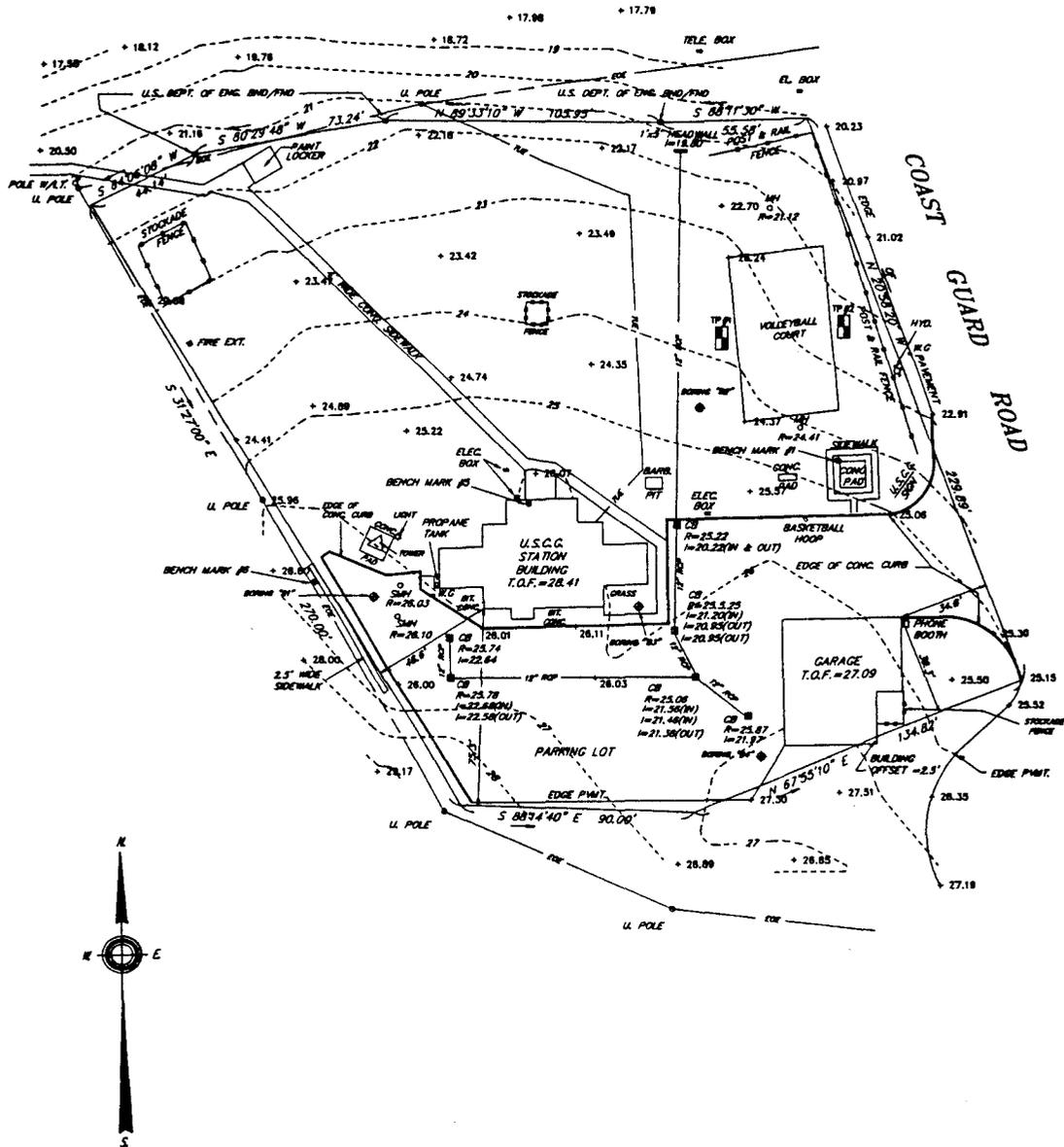
SITE PLAN CIRCA 1960: WW II BARRACKS REMOVED



Source: U.S. Coast Guard First District, Boston, Mass, Civil Engineering, "Cape Cod Canal Lifeboat Station, Sandwich Mass, Plot Plan," December 22, 1959.

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EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS 1991



Source: U.S. Coast Guard Facilities Design & Construction Center Civil Engineering, Norfolk, VA, "Multi Mission Station, Cape Cod Canal, Sandwich, MA Existing Site Conditions," April 10, 1991.