

U.S. COAST GUARD CAPE COD CANAL STATION, STATION HOUSE
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-A

HABS
MASS
1-SAND,
2A-

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 BUILDINGS SURVEY
U.S. COAST GUARD CAPE COD CANAL STATION, STATION HOUSE
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MASS
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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 station house was constructed as an updated office and residential (berthing) facility for the U.S. Coast Guard Cape Cod Canal 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. At least one other identical station house has been located (Montauk, Long Island, New York). Similar-styled station houses exist in the region, including station houses at Block Island (New Harbor) and Point Judith, RI. and were built under federal New Deal WPA/PWA initiatives during the 1935-37 period. These buildings collectively represent the early 20th century function of the Coast Guard's lifesaving stations along the New England coast.

Part I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection and subsequent modifications:** Plot plans and surveys in the archives of the U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Unit (CEU) Providence indicate analysis of the site and acquisition in the Fall of 1935. Construction drawings and site plans in the same archives, derived from a Coast Guard station house prototype of earlier design, are dated December 1935. Construction photographs in the archives of the U.S. Coast Guard Historian indicate that the station house was erected in 1936 with substantial completion of the exterior in November of that year.
2. **ARCHITECT:** The architect of the station house is not known. Based upon the design of the building, the architect could have been Victor Mendleheff, the last of a series of architects to work for the U.S. Life-Saving Service. The building could also have been designed by Public Works Administration/Works Progress Administration (PWA/WPA) staff. The design is related to the so-called "Chatham Type" of Life-Saving Stations designed by Mendleheff for the U.S. Life-Saving Service and subsequent to 1915, the U.S. Coast Guard, and constructed between 1914 and 1929. Not much is known about Victor Mendleheff's career as an architect before he joined the Life-Saving Service in 1896-97. His personnel records are missing from federal files and there are no references to his work in known architectural or biographical publications. Mendleheff was, however, the most prolific of U.S. Life-Saving Service architects, and he was employed by the Service for longer than any other of the Service's station designers.
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** The station house has been continuously owned by the United States Coast Guard since its erection in 1935.
4. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** Plans and specifications in the archives of the CEU Providence indicate that the following firms were involved in the original construction of the station house:
 - o General contractor/ builder - unknown, possibly Public Works Administration
 - o Wrought iron work -
John E. Cox Co., Inc., Fall River, MA

5. **Original plans and construction:** The original appearance of the building's exterior, documented by architectural drawings in the archives of the U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Unit (CEU) Providence and by construction photographs in the collection of the U.S. Coast Guard Historian (2100 Second Street S.W., Washington, D.C), was distinctive for its skin of shingles, wooden storm sash and shutters, defined by plain corner boards and Colonial Revival details.
6. **Alterations and additions:** Exterior alterations of the facility are documented by plans in the CEU Providence archive, including the World War II era construction of a new signal platform and addition to the watch house in 1943 (tower on the roof of the station house), the construction of nearby barracks housing before 1944, installation of metal fire escapes in 1978, rehabilitation of the watch house to its 1936 configuration and the installation of a large plate glass window in the west wing in 1979, residing of the station house in vinyl clapboards and general rehabilitation for energy efficiency in 1979 and the addition of metal aluminum storm sash in 1981. Major interior modifications and updating occurred during the 1978-81 period with the removal of the station's radio room from the watch house to the west wing, and renovations to the basement/cellar shop and drill room for station indoor recreation facilities. During this period, the station kitchen and mess deck were also renovated. Within the last decade, a women's berthing (sleeping) area was incorporated in renovations to the station Officer-in-Charge (OIC) quarters, and the east wing, originally used as the OIC living room, was updated as office space. The station house has been altered on the exterior by residing in vinyl clapboards, and the addition of aluminum storm windows and metal fire escapes with access doors in window openings.

B. Historical Context:

The original station house at this site, located adjacent to the Cape Cod Canal is presumed to have been built in 1920 (U.S. Coast Guard Life-Saving Station #31). This facility consisted of a station house - residence and tower with an adjacent wharf and ramp. The facility functioned without a harbor of refuge. The first rescue by this unit is reported in a local newspaper account for June 23, 1920 according to Sandwich Town Archivist Russell A. Lovell, Jr.

The Cape Cod Canal was initially constructed between 1909 and 1914 as a privately financed commercial enterprise under the primary control of financier August Perry Belmont. The 17.5 mile long canal cuts across the narrow western isthmus of Cape Cod, joining Buzzards Bay with Cape Cod Bay. Built to assist ship traffic to traverse the region between two great eastern commercial harbors,

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New York and Boston, the canal is a favored alternative to the treacherous shoals off Cape Cod and Nantucket.

The Canal was sold to the federal government in 1928.

During the widening of the Canal under federal ownership in the period 1935-37, the southern canal bank in the area of the station was moved south about 75 feet, necessitating the removal of the 1920 live-saving facilities and the construction of the present station house. A harbor of refuge/boat basin was constructed west of the station house at this time.

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) on the station house.

During World War II, the Cape Cod Canal became a primary safe shipping route along the coast.

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. 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. Pre-war 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. The station house observation tower was the command center for the complex. 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 pre-war exterior configuration. The barracks halls were removed prior to 1960.

The design of the station house is derived from prototypes developed by the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Life-Saving Service (prior to 1915). In successive renovation and building programs nationally, life-saving facilities evolved as specialized building forms for their function to provide around-the-clock personnel for saving lives during maritime disasters. The location of such a facility at the Cape Cod Bay end of the Cape Cod Canal is an obvious choice due to shipping and recreational boating traffic through the corridor.

Architecturally the building evokes the popular Colonial Revival style, first appropriated for life-saving facilities by Victor Mendleheff, the last of a line of architects to be employed by the U.S. Life-Saving Service before the U.S. Coast Guard was formed in 1915 out of the Life-Saving Service and the Revenue Cutter Service by an act of Congress. The prototypes included basic interior arrangements based upon the functional program of housing offices, staff, and watch tower activities. These arrangements included a station office, separate living quarters for the Officer-in-Charge (OIC), a mess room and kitchen, shop and drill rooms or recreational facilities, a central or attached watch room - usually a tower lookout room, and dormitory-styled berthing rooms for the station staff and possibly disaster survivors in an emergency. Mendelheff's prototypes which evolved from the late 1890s through 1915 included architectural themes similar to that at the Cape Cod Station; symmetrical and detailed Colonial Revival residential-styled buildings with Tuscan-columned entries, shingled exterior fabric, multi-paned double hung windows, fanlight windows with keystones in each gable, and octagonal high-peaked lookout towers, many of which were centrally-located. Whether or not the Cape Cod Canal station house is a Mendelheff design is conjecture. Certainly it is a derivative of his work and an expression of the popularity of the Colonial Revival style in coastal New England. During the period of construction several nearly identical stations were being built in the region under Works Progress Administration (WPA) initiatives. It is likely that WPA assistance was utilized for the U.S. Coast Guard Cape Cod Canal facilities including the station house employing a design prototype developed from Mendelheff's work.

Part II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The station house is a symmetrical Colonial Revival-styled building with an overall residential appearance setback from the canal on a small rise and lawn. The building contains a central 2-1/2 story gable roofed section flanked by single story wings. Across the principal canal facing elevation is a single story porch supported by a series of paired Tuscan columns. Placed in the center of the roof of the building is a octagonal hip-roofed observation tower.

2. Condition of fabric: The station house has been sheathed with vinyl siding. A dormer and a window have been infilled to provide access for an exterior fire escape and all of the windows have been retrofitted with aluminum storm windows. A large plate glass picture window has been installed in the north elevation of the west wing, and the south door hood has been enclosed in a vinyl sheathed vestibule. The interior of

the building has been renovated several times since initial construction. Some original features remain. Much has been altered. The overall condition of the structure, however, appears to be sound. The building has been continuously used and maintained since it was constructed.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The station building is a 5 X 3 bay, 2-1/2 story, gable-roofed structure with flanking 1 X 1 bay, single story wings. A hip-roofed tower is located in the center of the central section of the building. The overall dimensions of the central section are 46' X 32'. Each flanking wing is 17' X 15'. The roof peak of the tower is approximately 46' high.

2. Foundations: The building rests on a parged concrete foundation with multiple cellar windows. This foundation is continuous with the flanking wings indicating that the central section of the building and the wings were constructed at the same time.

3. Walls: The original exterior wall fabric has been concealed beneath vinyl clapboard siding. The exterior of the building was characterized with wide corner boards and boxed soffit/cornices which return in the end gables. These features are either partially or wholly concealed by the vinyl siding.

4. Structural systems, framing: Historical photographs verify that the building's walls are stick framed and covered with a diagonal board sheathing to which an outer skin of shingles is attached.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The two entrances to the building are characterized by sheltered approaches. The parking lot or service entrance on the secondary south elevation retains the remnants of a door hood, now encased in a vinyl clad open vestibule. The original pedimented, gable-roofed door hood is now the vestibule roof. Side walls concealed the original door hood console brackets. The primary north elevation facing the lawn and canal is characterized by a porched entrance with the door enframingent partially concealed by vinyl exterior wall fabric. The single level porch, which graces the entire north elevation of the central section of the building, has a second level balustrade of rectangular sawn wood. Access to the roof of the porch has been established through conversion of a central window to a door for fire egress. The 3 X 1 bay porch is supported by a concrete pier foundation and retains a concrete decking. The porch roof is supported by paired and tapered Tuscan columns on metal plynths. Rectilinear corner columns and pilasters

provide additional support at the corners and building wall. Decorative iron railings form a balustrade between the column pairs and flank a central concrete flight of steps leading to the porch from the lawn and sidewalk.

6. Chimneys: A brick chimney rises in the west end gable of the central section of the building and above the roof line it is topped with brick corbelling.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The station house has multiple window openings, but only two door openings. A rear door providing a service entrance is located off center on the west end of the south facade facing the service parking lot. The primary entrance, located on the canal or north facade of the building is central in the facade and has a simple enframement.

b. Windows and shutters: Although triple-track aluminum storm sash has been added to all window openings, the original window sash is intact in virtually every window. The original window configurations now extant include 6/6, 8/8 and 4/4 double hung styles, with the former predominating. Each flanking wing retains one double hung 8/8 style window. Likewise, each wing retains at least one tripartite set of windows in which the central window, a 6/6 type, is flanked by 4/4 types. The only variance to the window theme is a set of two windows in the south elevation which are above the kitchen sink. The building was originally equipped with louvered window shutters. Even the round-arched dormer windows prominent in the roof and the round-arched garret windows in the end gables were equipped with shutters. These round-arched windows are 6/6 in style, double hung, and are characterized by round-arched trim enframements ornamented with keystones. Doors to the building have been altered, but are generally of wood with 6 paned glass tops over horizontal wood-paneled bottoms.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, coverings: The gable roof of the station house is sheathed in asphalt shingles. It is punctuated by six gabled-roofed dormers and a central octagonal hip-roofed observation tower. The flanking wings have matching gable roofs.

b. Cornice and eaves: The roof cornice is a boxed soffit with mouldings concealed by aluminum gutters. Each end gable has cornice returns.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: The observation tower rises a single story above the gable peak and it is characterized by multiple tripartite windows in each of the north, east and west elevations looking out over the canal, the eastern approaches to the canal and Cape Cod Bay. A decorative steel balustrade encloses a narrow exterior walkway around the tower with access through the shingled south-facing elevation. Connected to the tower are various meteorological instruments, a radio antenna and a TV antenna.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The interior of the station house has been altered, modernized and generally rehabilitated over time for station program efficiency and the location of Coast Guard equipment. The original floor plan, however, is still retained in many areas.

The cellar plan originally called for a large shop and drill room to be located in the western section of the cellar. This area is now used for indoor recreation and a TV lounge. The central portions of the cellar originally included the stairwell and two small rooms for storm clothes and provisions. These rooms have been converted to office space. The eastern portion of the cellar contains the boiler room and addition storage space. These functions have not changed.

The first floor plan retains much of its original configuration and designed uses. The central stairhall provides a residential orientation essentially dividing the space between office uses in the western section and kitchen, mess uses in the eastern section. Originally, the western section contained the living quarters for the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) as well as the primary station office. Built-in lockers were included in the plan for ordnance and charts. The OIC's accommodations included a living room in the western wing, private bedroom and bathroom. Short hallways connected the OIC's living room to the station office and the station office to the principal entrance hall and staircase. The OIC's living room has now been converted to the OIC's office space. The adjoining bedroom is now used as the women's sleeping quarters or berthing room. An additional bedroom nearby shown on the original plans is now used as office space. Within the eastern section of the first floor, across the entrance/stairhall from the station office is the mess room, or station dining room. Adjacent to this room on the southern side of the building is the station kitchen. These rooms have been altered significantly within the last 10-15 years. The station commercial-type cooking stove is perhaps the only remaining original feature. A day room in the eastern wing

has been converted to the station communications room.

The second floor plan includes two double bedrooms in the western section, a central storage hall and adjoining crew's bathroom (on the south side), and in the eastern section a crew's dormitory. These areas, at present, retain their functional use, although interior wall fabric and other features have been remodeled and altered over time.

The garret floor (third floor) is punctuated by round-arched windows in the end gables and multiple dormers. It retains much of its original integrity. The space is still used for additional sleeping or berthing quarters in a dormitory-like configuration with two large rooms flanking the central octagonal stairhall access to the observation tower. Built-in storage lockers with raised paneled doors are part of the character of these spaces and convey their functional use as dormitory living spaces. The observation tower/watch room access consists of the original pipe metal ladder with rails. This ladder enters the tower through a hatch. The interior of the watch room in the tower has been completely stripped to the stud walls.

2. Stairways: The central stairway is enclosed within the stairhalls on the cellar, first, and second floors. The open portions of the staircase within the cellar and first floor retain their rectangular milled balusters, simple railings and turned newels.

3. Flooring: Wood flooring materials have largely been altered or covered.

4. Wall and ceiling finishes: Original wall and ceiling finishes have been covered in many areas with incompatible materials including dropped ceilings and sound proof tiles. Original plaster finishes exist in the station office and in the berthing spaces on the upper floors. The typical wall of these spaces retains both a flat mop board and a simple flat chair rail with an unadorned plaster wall surface. The mop board surfaces within the small hall leading to the station office have been sheathed in copper.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways, doors, hardware: Many original interior doors are extant within the building. These doors appear to have been specifically chosen for the station and are characterized by raised panels and unusual brass hardware, with knobs and turn-bolts. The overall appearance is nautical. Doors that add to the character of the interior include the chart cupboard and ordnance

cupboard doors in the station office, and the entry hall doors adjacent to this space, one of which is a glass and wood paneled door.

b. Windows: The windows have plain interior trim.

8. Mechanical Equipment

a. Heating: The building is heated with an conventional oil-fired, steam system. There are no other significant mechanical heating or ventilating systems in the building other than an exhaust fan for the kitchen range.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Cape Cod Station at Sandwich is located on a trapezoidal parcel of approximately 1.5 acres. The two largest buildings on the property, station house and equipment building, are located within the southern portion of the site on the highest elevation. To the north of the buildings sloping toward the Cape Cod Canal is a wide lawn bounded by low shrubs and a concealed stone wall. The site is bordered by public roads on the east north and northwest. The site provides the station house with a wide view of the canal from a distance, the station house, itself presenting an imposing presence on the eastern end of the canal due to its setback and location on a rise. In addition to the buildings located in close proximity to the station house are boathouse and dock facilities both on the U.S. Government basin to the northwest and on the canal itself to the northeast. The station house is sited between these two facilities and was originally more closely associated with the canal boathouse to the northeast. The principal elevation of the station house, which is dominated by the facade wide porch faces the lawn and the canal. This side of the building was originally linked to the canal boathouse by way of a diagonal concrete walkway. A similar diagonal walkway now connects the station to the boat docks in the U.S. Government basin to the northwest. The entrance to the station house from this canal-side elevation is still considered the front entrance.

The south elevation of the building faces the station parking area. This large space connects the station equipment room with the service entrance to the facility and the adjoining roadway which provides access. The parking lot is paved in macadam and is bordered to the south by a wetland area. On the site to the southwest and northwest of the station house are the foundation remains of two buildings constructed on the site during WW II. These buildings were long barracks-type structures on raised concrete slabs or pier type foundations.

PART III. 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 Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (basement plan)," 1935.
- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (first floor plan)," December 12, 1935.
- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (second floor plan)," December 12, 1935.
- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (loft floor plan, door details)," December 12, 1935.
- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (watch house in observation tower, details)," December 12, 1935.
- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (north elevation)," December 12, 1935.
- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (south elevation)," December 12, 1935.
- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (east and west elevations)," December 12, 1935.

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- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (cross section, window details)," December 12, 1935.
- U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Office, Washington, DC, "Cape Cod Canal Station Dwelling, (observation tower elevation, section)," 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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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.

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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

PART 1V. PROJECT INFORMATION

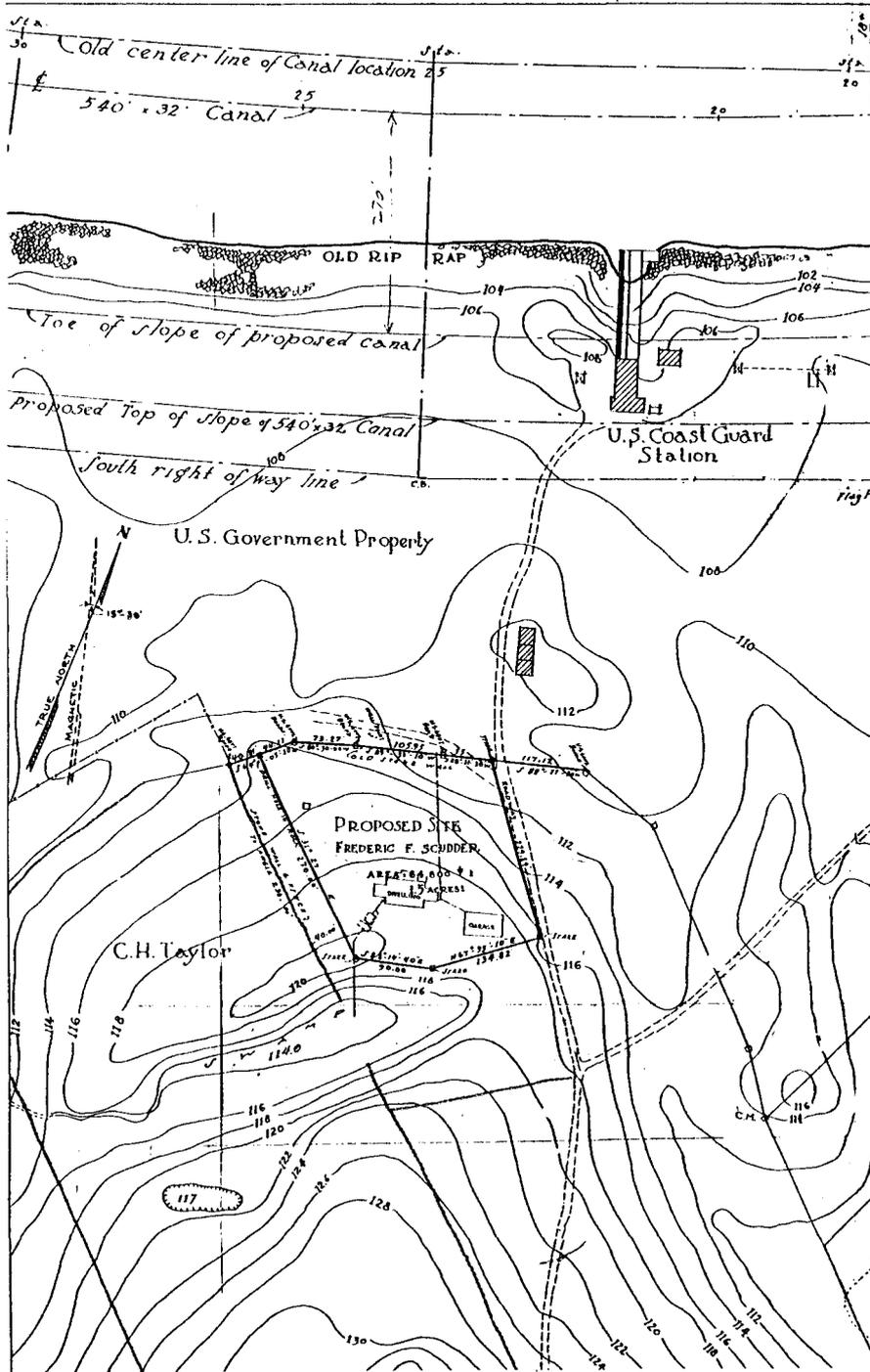
The preparation of written, graphic and photographic documentation for the station house and equipment buildings has been undertaken as mitigation, in part, for the proposed rehabilitation/new construction of these buildings to meet the demands of an expanded program. The rehabilitation project includes 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

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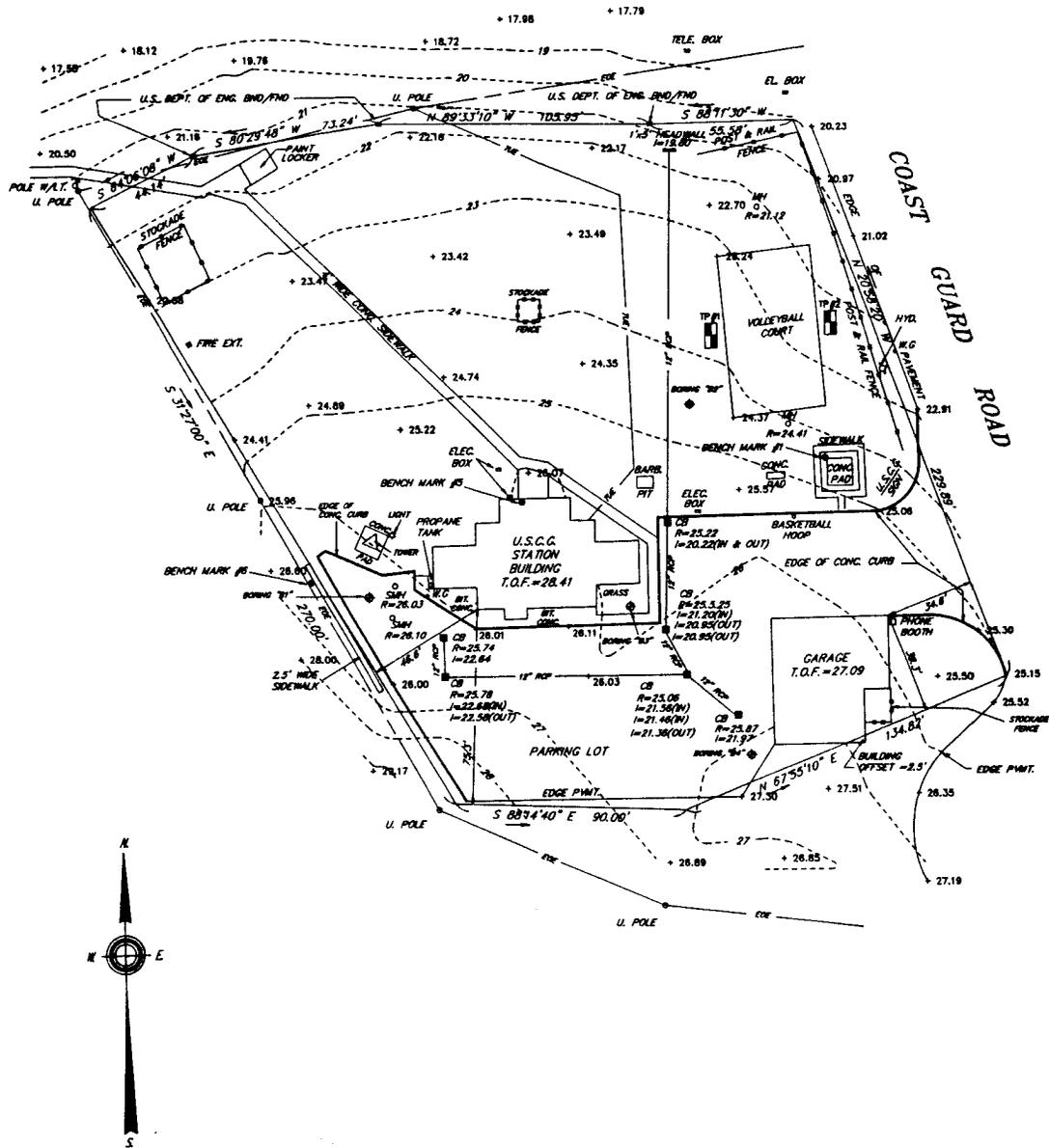
PROPERTY FEATURES 1935



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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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.