



Ocean City
Life-Saving
Station
Museum

Then & Now

The Story of the
Life-Saving Station Building
A Self-Guided Tour

Welcome to the Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum.

You are entering one of the most unique buildings in this Town. It once housed the U.S. Life-Saving Service and later on the Coast Guard. It is one of the oldest Ocean City buildings still in existence. The station was moved to this location at the Inlet in December of 1977 from Caroline Street (about 9 blocks north) in order to be repurposed as a Museum. As you explore the building keep in mind that it has been rotated 90 degrees from its original orientation. The boat room doors originally faced the Atlantic Ocean.

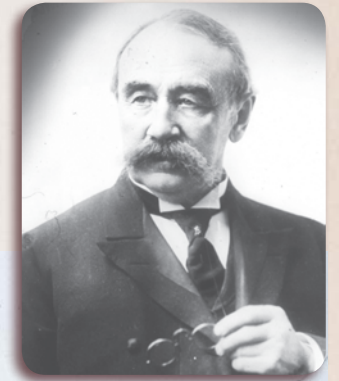
What is the U.S. Life-Saving Service and why was it in Ocean City?

The mission of the Life-Saving Service was twofold: (1) to prevent ship disasters on the shoals or upon entering ports, and (2) to rescue and provide aid to those shipwrecked. The first U.S. Life-Saving



Station in Ocean City, Maryland was built in 1878 on the beach at Caroline Street. At the time, the building was considered to be on the northern outskirts of the "village." Since this station saw much activity during its first ten years, the government saw cause to enlarge the facility. The original station was moved back to provide room for a new larger building. The new station (this building) opened its doors in 1891. There were 25 stations on the East coast at that time. Each of them had a red roof to help make them more visible to sailing ships. There was a Keeper (man in charge) and 6 to 8 surfmen (crew) who lived at each station. The job of these surfmen was to spot ships in distress or that were in danger of coming too close to shore and assist in rescue if they wrecked. Keep in mind that most shipwrecks did not occur during fair weather. The surfmen worked from November

to April. When signing up for employment, they were taking on a very dangerous seasonal job for about \$30 per month. The unofficial motto of these men was "you have to go out, but you don't have to come back." They were also required by the Superintendent of the Service, Sumner I. Kimball, to perform daily drills as preparation to respond quickly to ships in distress. The only full time member who lived at the station year round was the Keeper. In 1915 the U.S. Life-Saving Service and the Revenue Cutter Service merged to form the United States Coast Guard. This building was then used by the Coast Guard until 1964 when they abandoned it and moved to a new station on the bayside. *There is a more detailed history of this building on an informational panel to your left as you enter the Museum from the gift shop.*



*Top: Superintendent of the Service, Sumner I. Kimball
Middle: The Breeches Buoy Drill c.1905
Bottom: Surfboat Drill c.1910
Opposite Page: Ocean City Life-Saving Station 1907*

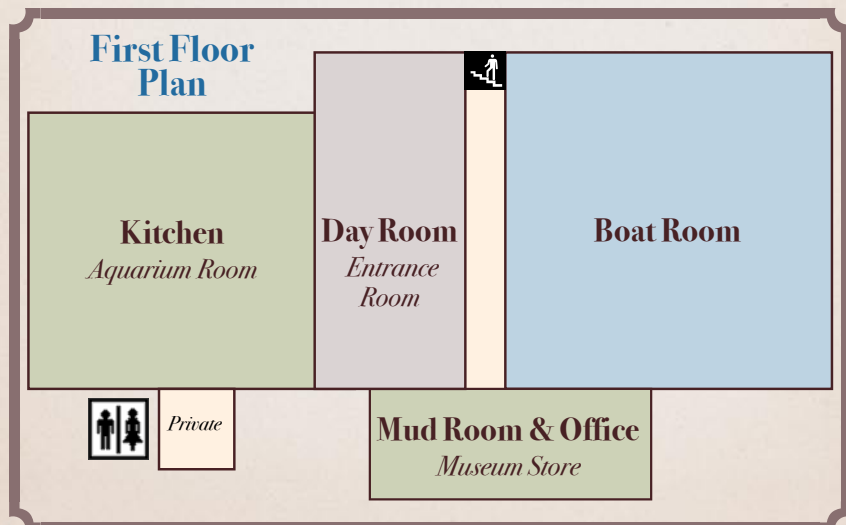
The Aquarium Room (The Kitchen)

This room was originally used by the surfmen as the kitchen. Today local critters from area waters make their home here. Did you know that there is one species of seahorse that can be found in The Sinepuxent Bay? There are 35 known species of seahorses. The lined seahorse is the only species found in our local bays and it can be observed in this room.



The Entrance Room (The Day Room)

The room in the center of the first floor featuring a display of “Sands of The World” was the “Day Room” for the station. It served as a living room or gathering place for the surfmen when and if they were off duty. Many storms have swept over Ocean City, but there were two storms that had significant impact on this town. The “Great Storms” panel describes these storms and their effects on the island. On “A Bird’s Eye View” panel, take a look at the position of the Inlet and the changes in Ocean City over the years. Ocean City was connected to Assateague Island before the Storm of 1933. *The touch screen in this room contains images of the upstairs exhibits as well as some very unique film footage which depicts a much different time in Ocean City, MD. It’s worth taking a look.*



The Boat Room

This very large room originally housed the surfboat and rescue equipment as it does today. As you enter the boat room on the left, there is an extremely rare piece of history. It is the Logbook from the original Ocean City Station. Each day a log was penned by the Keeper to record the activities of the day.

The type S Pulling Surfboat from Caffey’s Inlet, North Carolina is on loan from the Smithsonian Institute. It was manufactured in the 1930s by the Coast Guard’s Curtis Bay Yard near Baltimore, MD. The apparatus cart is an original piece from the Green Run Life-Saving Station that has been restored. Notice the wide wheels on the carriage designed to make the cart easier to pull over the sand to the scene of a wreck. Of course most shipwrecks did not occur directly in front of the station. It took a tremendous amount of effort by the surfmen to pull the apparatus cart or the surfboat along the beach. After completing this exhausting task, the rescue operation could begin.



The boat room also has a reproduction breeches buoy. The breeches buoy and the surfboat carriage are the only reproduction pieces in our collection of Life-Saving Service equipment. The breeches buoy, the life-car and the surfboat were three ways in which a rescue could be performed. *Watch the short videos in the kiosk for more information.*



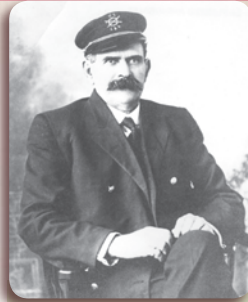
*Top: Typical Day Room
Bottom: Crew of the North Beach Station
in the boat room c.1905
Opposite Page: Station Cook clowning with
Coast Guard Crew c.1930*

The Surf's Up Room (The Keeper's Bedroom)

The stairway leads to the second floor. Currently there is a "Surf's Up!" exhibit in what was once the Keeper's bedroom. As the man in charge of the station, he had a room to himself. The Museum Office is now located in what was the Keeper's bathroom. During your time in the Keeper's Room, make sure you look at one of the first surfboards in Ocean City made by local businessman George Bert Cropper. It weighed over 160 lbs. when he first built it. The board has been modified over time to make it easier to carry, but it is still quite heavy.

The Davy Jones' Locker Room (The Crew's Bathroom)

The Davy Jones' Locker Room contains many artifacts recovered by area divers from shipwrecks. Famous wrecks such as the *Andrea Doria* and the *Empress of Ireland* are represented in this room. Also in the room are items found and recovered by area fishing and clamming vessels. This room was once the Crewmember's bathroom.



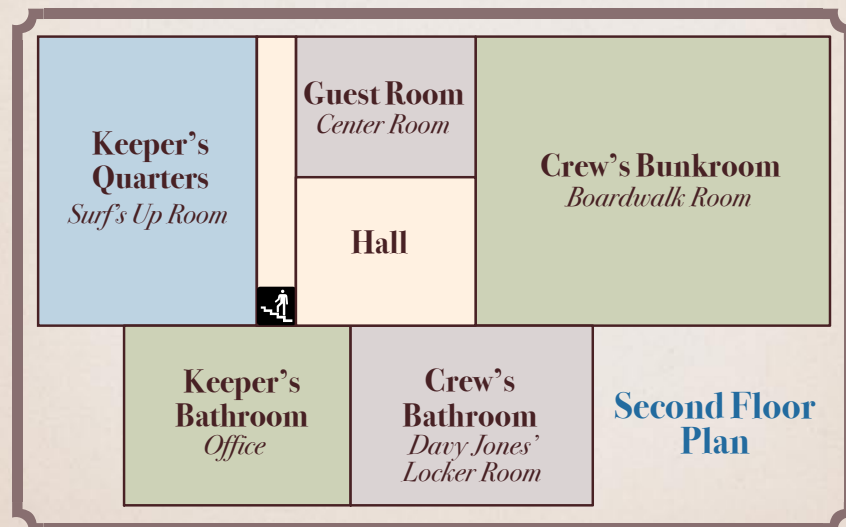
*Keeper George
D. Hitchens -
Smith Island
Life-Saving Station
1882 - 1914*

The Upstairs Center Room (The Guest Room)

The center room next to the stairway was used for visiting guests or shipwreck victims who were rescued and in need of a place to stay. Our changing exhibits fill the hallway area currently.

The Boardwalk Room (The Crew's Bunkroom)

The Suzanne B. Hurley Room which currently houses the "Boardwalk of Yesterday" exhibit was used as a bunk room for the crew. They also shared bathroom facilities which were located in the Davy Jones' Locker Room. Access to the cupola (tower) is restricted today, but the surfmen stationed here would "stand watch" in the tower during the day. One surfman was expected to alertly scan the water, checking for those in distress and logging the passage of ships. At night the surfmen took turns patrolling the beach and looking for any ships sailing too close to shore or in need of assistance. While in this room, take a moment to listen to Laughing Sal and imagine you were in the Fun House just off the Boardwalk on Worcester Street or being pushed down the Boardwalk in the rolling chair in the 1920's for the hefty sum of 25 cents.



*Top: Cupola
Bottom Left: The rescued crew of the
Yamacraw wrecked March 4, 1917
off of Ocean City, MD
Bottom Right: Surfman #3 Quillin
and Family c.1900*



Thank you for taking this self guided tour.

We hope you enjoyed your time here. This brochure was inspired by Bob Stevens and his passion for preserving and presenting U.S. Life-Saving Service History. Bob has been and continues to be a dedicated board member, volunteer and an inspiration for all who have had the pleasure of interacting with him.

Please consider joining the Museum Society!

Your membership helps us to continue our mission of preserving and presenting the story of the U.S. Life-Saving Service on the Delmarva Peninsula and the history of Ocean City, MD.

Becoming a Member has never been easier or more affordable. Membership includes free admission into the Museum, 10% discount on gift shop merchandise, and a copy of "Scuttlebutt" our newsletter.

Yes, I'd like to become a Museum Society Member!

Choose your payment method:

1. Mail your check with this form to: Ocean City Museum Society Inc,
P.O. Box 603, Ocean City, MD 21843
2. Pay securely online via Paypal on our website under the Membership tab:
www.ocmuseum.org
3. Pay in person at the Museum Gift Shop via credit card, cash or check.

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A Museum membership also makes a great gift!

Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum
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