

## **Portage Canal Life Saving Service Station. Houghton MI.. later Hancock MI**

*"The Blue Book says we've got to go out and it doesn't say a damn thing about having to come back."* - Captain Patrick Etheridge, USLSS

*"I will ensure that my superiors rest easy with the knowledge that I am on the helm, no matter what the conditions."* - Surfman's Creed

What is the origin of the saying "You have to go out, but you do not have to come back"? see: <http://www.uscg.mil/history/faqs/LSSmotto.asp>

The lighthouse lights were not created to act as range lights. Bringing a vessel into the 100-foot wide canal in inclement weather would be a challenge to any vessel captain. The comment was, "it was like threading a needle." Numerous vessels ended up on the beach or sand bars on the wrong side of the rock break walls, or hit the piers on the inside. These problems helped encourage the government to build a life saving station.

### **Locations of the Early Portage Ship Canal Life-Saving Stations and Coast Guard Stations.**



1885-1902 west bank (Houghton side),  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile down canal = Portage Ship Canal LSS

1902- 1934 east bank (Hancock side) = Portage LSS 1902 - 1915,

Portage Coast Guard 1915-1934

Canal widened from 100 feet to 500 feet at entrance. Second location was removed with widening.

1935- 1990 on east bank where you see the open area

1990 temporary in Hancock

1997 Dollar Bay

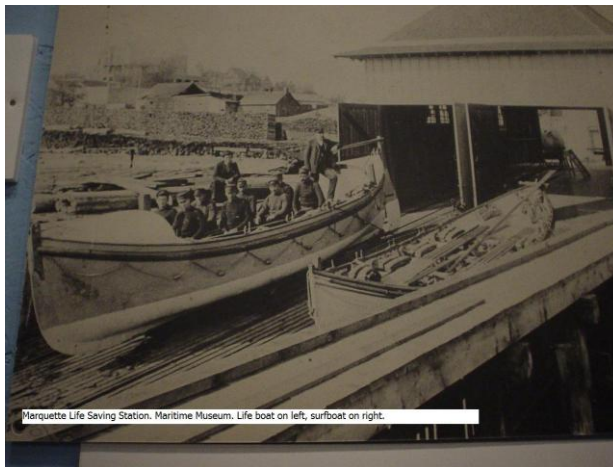
## Equipment they used and drilled with were:

- Beach Cart done on Thursdays in US LSS



*On a calm day, Captain Charles A. Tucker (right) directs a beach-cart drill. Rescuers used a "Lyle Gun" that could shoot a projectile out from shore about 1,200 feet. The projectile carried a rescue line to a grounded ship. Then rescuers strung heavier lines from the beach cart to bring survivors ashore one by one in a "breeches-buoy." (Photo from the Mildred Glaza collection.)*

- Boats



Marquette LSS Picture at Marquette Maritime Museum. Lifeboat on left and surfboat on right.

– Lifeboat



Portage LSS lifeboat by watch tower. 1921.

– Surfboat



Marquette LSS surfboat at Maritime Museum.



Eagle Harbor's 34 foot Merryman with sails.

• Cork Lifebelt



- Heaving Stick and Line



- Beach Apparatus
- Lyle Gun



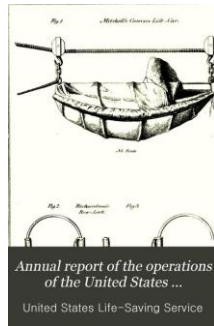
at Marquette Maritime Museum – Gun and projectiles.

- Breeches Buoy also done on Thursdays in USLSS



This is Portage doing a breeches buoy drill. The far right structure is the ship's mast and the buoy is on the rope between the mast and upside down V.

- Lifecar



- Coston Flare



Picture at Marquette's Maritime Museum 2010

US LSS all had the same schedule for drills: Monday was for equipment maintenance, Tuesday was rowing drill and capsizing drill, Wednesday was for flag signals/wig wag, Thursday beach apparatus/breeches buoy, Friday body resuscitations (CPR), Saturday was for station and ground and housekeeping duties.

## **Portage Ship Canal Life Saving Station.**

### **Creation of the Station.**

www.uscg.mil/history shares that the station was called Ship Canal. 3/4 mile from the north end on West Bank. USLSS #13. Date of Conveyance was 1880. The station was built in 1884.

See site below for pictures and bit of narrative.

<http://www.michiganlights.com/PortagelakeshipcanalLSS.htm>

## First Location

The Portage Ship Canal Life Saving Station was created in 1884. #13. This station became #300 in at least 1935, maybe 1902.

Created in 1884 on the west bank (Houghton side) of the Portage Ship Canal in then Hancock



Township.

This was the fifth station built on Lake Superior. The first four were the famed stations west of Whitefish Point on the shipwreck coast. According to Michigan Lighthouse Conservancy other Lake Superior LSS stations were built ....

- Deer Park 1876
- Two Hearted 1876
- Crisp Point 1876
- Vermillion 1876
- Portage 1884
- Marquette 1890
- Grand Marais 1899
- Eagle Harbor 1912

It was furnished and manned by a Keeper/Captain and seven Surfmen. It opened Spring of 1885. The dwelling housed the crew and boats. Boats were powered by oars and sails. They had no lookout tower and were too far from the entrance to the canal which lead to it's moving in 1902. Some rescues during this time were:

First rescue in USLSS Annual Reports was June 15, 1885: Badger State was in thick fog and sending whistles to the station. Surfboat went out and guided the propeller into the canal entrance.

Other assists/rescues were Hyack, Fountain City, capsized fishing boat, Clyde, Monitor, Mores, Sea Gull, Moss, City of Fremont, Rice, Music, Tuttle, Seaman, Keystone, Belle Stevens, Myles, Reed Case, Holland, JC Morse, Bessemer/Schuylkill, Minnehaha, Idaho, Hebard, Constitution, Williams, Mowatt, Peerless, Crostwaite, Hattie, Valerie, Colton, Anderson, Donaldson, Montana, Norseman, Arnold, Barker, McGregor, King, Wenona, Colorado, Mead/Mediator, Toledo, Farwell, Massachusetts, Genevieve, Carpenter, Troy, Racine, Gawn, Mere, Blaine, Abyssinia, Harold, Bon Voyage, Fern, Marguerite, Holley, Paisley, and Donaldson.

The rescue of the Wallaces and Bradley in Marquette were done by putting equipment on a train and going out.. this being before Marquette had a station.

Keepers here were:

Steele 1885-1886  
Ocha, Albert 1886-1891  
Smith 1891-1899  
McCormick Thomas 1900 - 1902

### **Second Location**

Stanton Township became its own township in 1902, the same time the Portage Ship Canal moved to the East Bank of canal and was named Portage Life-Saving Station.



This location had a tower (far left of picture) manned 24 hours/day during navigational season. There was a boathouse (next to the tower), a station building for business and the crew, a duplex residence for the Keeper, and his No 1 surfman and their families, and several support buildings. This was a first class station. It received the first motorized life boat to serve the Keweenaw.

The radio tower, steel structure was for triangulation of sounds... ship, fog signal and radio beacon.. so ships could know location in fog.

Directly across the canal was the North Canal Lighthouse built in 1874. (Oskar community was founded in 1875). There were 4 pier lights and a pair of steam fog whistles. The opening to canal was 100 feet. It was constantly dredged due to sand and silt.

Keeper here was:

McCormick, Thomas 1902-1918

Assists/rescues during this time period were:

Argo, Mautneee, Wilbor/Bliss, Yamika, Davidson, Matanzas, Smith/Foffinberry, Hutchinson, Godfrey, Mary2, Orinoco, Uranus, Pasadena, Foster, Allegheny, Stewart, Harder, Louisiana, Muskegon, Meacham, Pathfinder, Circle, Moreland, Manistique, Exile, Alaska, Livingston, and Waldo.

### **Third Location**

USLSS and Revenue Marine merged with LSS in 1915 to form today's Coast Guard.



In 1935 the station moved further South on East Bank. It was built by Verville Construction a few hundred yards inside the entrance on the canal when widening of the canal took place. The entrance was now 500 feet wide.. tapering to 300 feet.

The USLSS Annual Reports do not include this time period..but from books the author has picked up these assists/rescues: Maplehurst, C Bradley, G Cox, and Cartercliff Hall.

The 1935-1990 ghost station remains on the Hancock Canal by McLains State Park. This one was built in 1935 when the canal was widened for shipping vessels. The entrance opening went then from a 100 foot opening to 500 foot opening. Many shipwrecks occurred when vessels tried to get into the narrow 100 foot opening in storms... thus the creation of the Life Saving Station and eventual widening. The North Canal Lighthouse was removed along with the Life-Saving Station as the land they sat on had to be removed. This land removing was accomplished from 1935 to 1937. See dredging topic for more information. A temporary light tower and fog signal was placed on the west side.

The station house held the crew quarters, gallery and office, along with a separate house for the officer in charge and his family.

A modern 3 stall boat house was built to launch directly into the widened canal. The old boathouse was moved to the new station and became a vehicle garage and maintenance facility. This building remains today.

This station had a 36-foot Motorized Life Boat, a 26 –foot power surfboat and a pulling surfboat. In the 1940's a 38-foot picket boat arrived.

The station was used for recruit training (50 men at a time) during World War 2, adding barracks and mess hall just north of the station. These were removed after the war.

In the 50's, a 40-foot patrol boat replaced the picket boat that was used with the 36 foot motorized Lifeboat. The two surfboats were discontinued during WW3.

In the 60's the station received a 44 –foot motorized life boat. The boat house and decking were inadequate so space was rented at dockside Hancock just west of the bridge.

In the 90's there were trailers for the crew and a work building.

Funding became available in the later 90's to build a 21<sup>st</sup> century Coast Guard facility in Dollar Bay, which opened September 1997.

Text above about each location was provided by Don Nelson of Jacobsville  
USLSS/USCG Station – Portage article.

They were unique in American History. Nothing like them ever existed before or since- The U.S. Life-Saving Service. The men of the old U.S. Life -Saving Service defined courage. They bled valor. Their unofficial motto: Regulations say we have to go out, they say nothing



about coming back. It was the way they lived and died.

Time and again, these storm warriors and heroes of the surf launched their small boats into crashing wave and screaming wind, not for personal gain or glory but for the satisfaction of saving lives of shipwrecked marines and passengers.

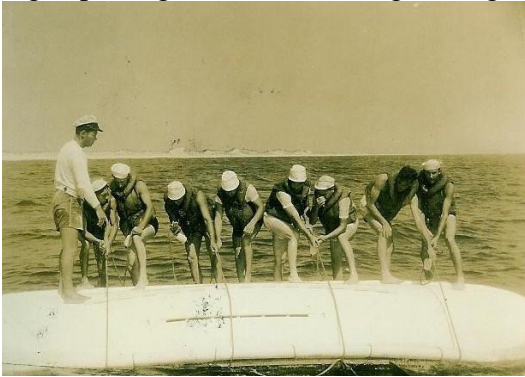
At one point in time surf men were paid a lousy 93 cents a day and from it they had to cover the cost of uniforms and rations. And it was seasonal employment without the guarantee of work the following year.

The USLSS crews were also intensely local. A man could spend his entire career at the same station or perhaps transfer to one a dozen miles distant. The benefit was a vast knowledge of local conditions, vital to make rescues under near impossible situations. They knew the reefs, shoals, sandbars and currents. Local man Oscar Marshall (married to Emma Koski, author's husband's ancestor) was in Life Saving Station here from in the early 1900's until he retired in 1937 with physical disability due to line of duty. Oscar's son, Arthur Marshall was also in the USCG. Life Saving Station turned to US Coast Guard.

About the surfmen as was taken from [They Had to Go Out... true stories of America's Coastal Life Savers from the pages of Wreck and Rescue Journal with foreword by Frederick Stonehouse.](#)

To read about personnel read the separate topic, [Personnel of the Portage Ship Canal, Portage Life-Saving Station, and Station Portage Coast Guard.](#)

Station surfmen had daily drills. Certain days for specific drills. One such drill was practice overturning/capsizing a surfboat and rightening it again.



Here is the medal earned in 1940 by Arthur Marshall son of Oscar Marshall:



### **Rescues and Assists:**

The Portage Canal Life Saving Station would go down in history for many famous rescues. This station, along with the Eagle Harbor Station (opened 1912), were the only stations where every member of both crews would receive the Gold Life-Saving Medal for heroism during one rescue. This was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 44 year history of LSS that 2 crews received medals for the same rescue.

This occurred by rescuing the crew of the **L.C. Waldo** shipwreck near Gull Rock Lighthouse at the tip of the Keweenaw Point on November 8, 1913.

In awarding the keepers and surfmen a Gold Lifesaving Medal, the department recognized the good judgment, skill, and undaunted heroism which stands with the most praiseworthy instances of bravery in the annals of the service.

#### Portage LSS

- Thomas H. McCormick, Keeper  
John McDonald  
John C. Alfsen  
Fred C. Sollman  
Paul Liedtke  
Collin S. Westrope  
David M. Small  
Oscar Marshall

#### Eagle Harbor LSS

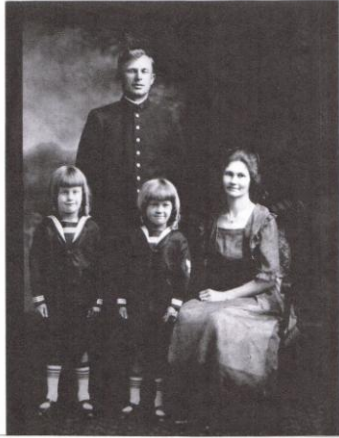
- Charles A. Tucker, Keeper  
Anthony F. Glaza  
Thomas W. Bennetts  
Serge Anderson  
John Beck  
Chester O. Tucker  
George Halpainem  
Charles Kumpula  
Henry Padberg



Oscar Marshall's LSS Gold Medal from 1913

- On 8 November 1913 the steamer *Waldo*, nearly 5,000 tons, was driven onto Gull Rock, off Keweenaw Point, Lake Superior. The wind was about 70 miles an hour and the sea very rough. The vessel broke in two and the imperiled people took shelter in the forward cabin, where they remained for 90 hours without food.
- News of the wreck reached the Eagle Harbor Life-Saving Station on 9 November and the crew made a brave effort on that day to reach the vessel in a power surfboat. After having proceeded 8 miles, the great amount of ice on the small boat made it impossible to go farther. The boat, therefore, returned to the station.
- Information concerning the disaster was not received at the Portage Life-Saving Station until noon on 10th November. The shortest distance to the wreck was 60 miles, but the keeper, chose to benefit from the protection afforded by the ship canal to Portage Entry. By taking this latter route, the distance to the *Waldo* was 80 miles. The keeper, before starting, coordinated for a tug to meet the power lifeboat as it emerged from the canal. The tug towed the lifeboat to the scene of the wreck. They arrived on scene at 3 AM on the 11th.
- While the Portage crewmen chopped the thick ice encasing the *Waldo*'s cabin, the Eagle Harbor crew arrived. Both lifeboats were ice-logged. This made maneuvering the boats more difficult and increased the hazard of the rescue. Despite these difficulties, the lifesavers, in the face of great danger, landed the 22 men and 2 women, all hands, and the ship's dog safely at Houghton, MI.

Local man Oscar Marshall was #7 Surfman (lowest/newest) for this *Waldo* rescue. On the Maplehurst rescue he was #3 in 1922. Oscar received his Good Conduct January 11, 1922. He retired in 1937 with 30+ years of service at Portage Station. His son Arthur was in the Coast Guard as well, receiving the Good Conduct Award in 1938 and in 1940 the Lifeboat Capsizing Competition.



Emma Koski Marshall and husband Oskar with two of their children – Arthur on the left and Adolph on the right. Other children were Doris and Ruth (twins – no information on them, assume died right after birth), Carlos and Dolores.

**[Pages From A Scrapbook:](#)** an incredible collection of photos from the scrapbook of BMC-L Ira Lewis, who served at small boat stations on Long Island for over twenty years, from the late-1930s to the late-1950s. His photos document life at these unheralded stations. See: [http://www.uscg.mil/history/WEBORALHISTORY/Ira\\_Lewis\\_Photo\\_Index.asp](http://www.uscg.mil/history/WEBORALHISTORY/Ira_Lewis_Photo_Index.asp)

Flags, Medals, Traditions, Memorials & Uniforms of the U.S. Coast Guard and Its Predecessor Services see:

[http://www.uscg.mil/history/Uniform\\_Index.asp](http://www.uscg.mil/history/Uniform_Index.asp)

Uniforms of the U.S. Life-Saving Service see:

[http://www.uscg.mil/history/uscghist/USLSS\\_Uniform\\_Index.asp](http://www.uscg.mil/history/uscghist/USLSS_Uniform_Index.asp)

**Lifesavers Duties & Equipment see**

[http://www.uslife-savingservice.org/lifesavers\\_duties\\_equipment](http://www.uslife-savingservice.org/lifesavers_duties_equipment)

**Boats of Service see**

[http://www.uslife-savingservice.org/boats\\_of\\_service](http://www.uslife-savingservice.org/boats_of_service)



Chronology of Early Lifesaving

[http://www.uslife-savingservice.org/chronology\\_of\\_early\\_lifesaving](http://www.uslife-savingservice.org/chronology_of_early_lifesaving)

**<http://www.uslife-savingservice.org/home>**

The US Life Saving Service Heritage Association (USLSSHA) is an organization dedicated to preserving the history of the US Life Saving Service and early US Coast Guard.

No other group of historic American buildings is more endangered than our lifesaving and lifeboat stations. To a far greater extent even than lighthouses, lifesaving stations are still being lost and falling into tragic disrepair.

The USLSSHA is dedicated to providing communication among many preservation-minded individuals and organizations regarding such things as saving stations and preserving artifacts.

Check out our information-packed quarterly magazine called *Wreck & Rescue*, detailing the many accounts of desperate shipwrecks and saving lives and preservation updates among many other things. Members receive this intriguing magazine quarterly. We also publish a quarterly newsletter called *Life Lines*, to update our members on matters between issues of the quarterly magazine.

We encourage you to join the organization today, get involved, and help save our history.

*The association is a national nonprofit (501c3) organization dedicated to preserving America's fast-vanishing lifesaving stations and early Coast Guard lifeboat stations.*

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