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# 100 Years of Saving Lives

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In July 1898, Charlevoix had been given word that it would receive a United States Lifesaving Station. By October 2, 1900, a beautiful new station, which cost ten thousand dollars, was ready for service on the Pine River between Lake Michigan and Round Lake. Its first commander was Captain Frank Fountain. He had left the South Pier Lifesaving station at the entrance of Chicago harbor because, as he stated in the July 5, 1900, *Charlevoix Sentinel* newspaper, "I have three young children and they have got to be in a place where I can bring them up properly and send them to school. I figured it out that there was more grass, sand and fresh air at Charlevoix." The first rescue took place on August 29 with the rescue of a swimmer at the nearby beach.

By the next spring Captain Fountain had directed his men, between mandatory lifesaving drills, to landscape the grounds surrounding the station and adorn them with plants from the station to the beach. Fountain later tapped into a nearby city-owned steam line and built a greenhouse over it for growing plants for summer planting.

Before the tragic death of Earl Cunningham, the Charlevoix station was most remembered for the August 29, 1906, rescue of passengers aboard the Northern Michigan Transit Company steamer *Illinois* after it ran aground south of the channel during a race with a schooner. During the twelve-hour overnight rescue, more than five hundred passengers were brought ashore by breeches buoy and lifeboat in the face of high winds and waves. In February 1926 five fishermen narrowly escaped being stranded on an ice floe much like the 1936 incident.

In April 1908 the station commander received official orders to ship its big lifeboat to Atlantic City, New Jersey, to receive a gasoline engine. It was returned in October.

In 1915 the Lifesaving Service and the Revenue Cutter Service were combined to form the U.S. Coast Guard. In 1939 the United States Lighthouse division also was merged with the Coast Guard. That same year the Charlevoix crew welcomed a new building at the Pine River location as a new 30 by 52-foot building west of the boat-house was constructed to house boats, trucks and trailers. No further construction occurred until 1962. In 1948 the station received a new 38-foot motorized lifeboat to replace the one that had served well for many years and a new 40-foot utility boat

Charlevoix Courier

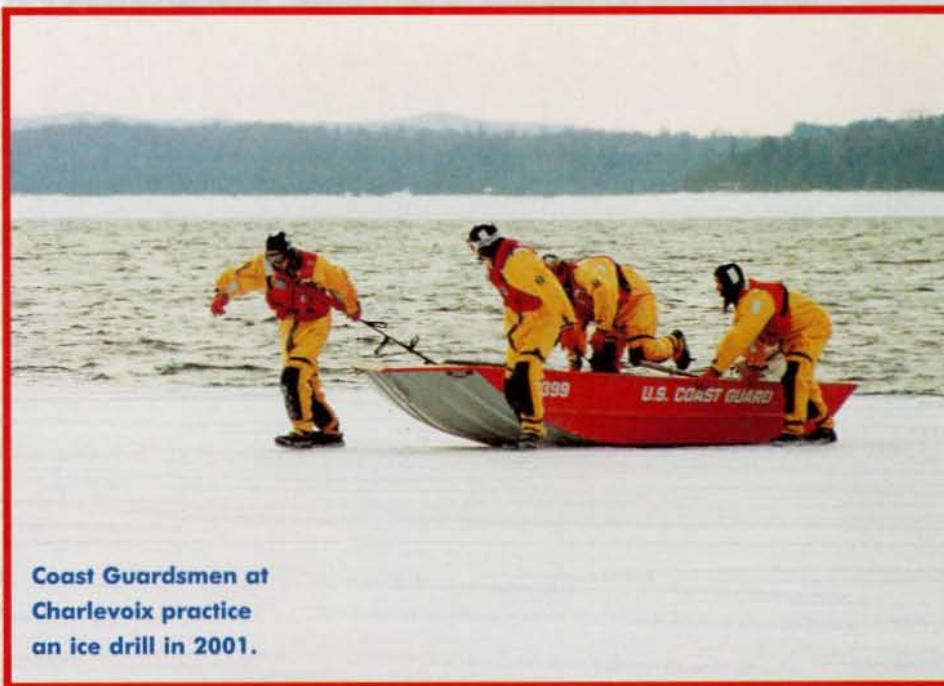
in 1952. In November 1958 the station's crew was involved in the recovery operations of the two survivors and another thirty-three men lost on the limestone carrier *Carl D. Bradley* after it foundered during a killer storm.

In 1962 a new \$300,000 lifeboat station and dock for the 180-foot Coast Guard Cutter *Sundew* was built farther east on the northern bank of the upper channel between Round Lake and Lake Charlevoix. This had been the site of the revenue cutter service depot since 1899. At that time the station housed thirty personnel responsible for law enforcement, boarding duty, aids to navigation maintenance, and primary search and rescue duties. Their rescue equipment then consisted of two 40-foot patrol boats, two 36-foot motor lifeboats and one 30-foot utility boat.

After the relocation of equipment and men in 1962, the original station was left to the elements until demolished. After the government officially abandoned the site the city regained ownership of the land as detailed in an 1899 agreement with the government. The only thing left to remind visitors of this station's existence today is the 1939-built garage-barracks building.

—Geoffrey D. Reynolds

# 100 YEARS of saving lives



Coast Guardsmen at Charlevoix practice an ice drill in 2001.