

A Look Back in Time

The United States Coast Guard Station, 5036 Fourth Avenue, received its' individual historic designation in 1983. It was determined that the U.S. Coast Guard Station is architecturally significant because it is a fine example of an unusual type of building in Wisconsin, a pre-World War II Coast Guard Station. The two buildings that make up the station have simple Colonial Revival details, but are important not for their style, but for the type of buildings they are. The Coast Guard Station is historically significant because it represents the development of modern Coast Guard services in Kenosha and represents the historic life saving services provided by Coast Guard predecessors since 1879. The Coast Guard has a long history of providing services to Lake Michigan boaters and shippers out of Kenosha harbor, and the modern Coast Guard buildings reflect the transition from the one-dimensional life saving service to the multi-dimensional maritime services offered by the modern Coast Guard.

The U.S. Coast Guard Station consists of two historic buildings constructed in 1934; the crew's residence and the boathouse. The crew's residence is a two and one-half story frame building with a gabled ell form and very simple Colonial Revival details. The low-pitched intersecting gable roof has returned eaves at the gable ends and projecting gable-roofed dormers along the east and west sides of the roof of the north wing of the building. These dormers have returned eaves and windows filled with six-over-six light double-hung sashes. There is a lunette window that decorates the north gable end, as well. The walls of the building are covered with artificial clapboard siding and are punctuated by regular fenestration of primarily six-over-six light double-hung sashes that are undecorated. Because the building sits into a small rise, the front of the building has a raised foundation. Simple, modern overhangs cover the front and rear entrances of the building and the front overhang is supported by simple posts.

The boathouse is a one and one-half story front gable building with a steeply-pitched gable roof and artificial siding. On the main elevation are two large "garage" type doors that cover boat entrances. These entrances have ramps attached to the floor that lead into the harbor and are used to ease the entry and exiting of boats stored in the boathouse. The other openings consist of simple sash windows and small entry doors.

The history of the U.S. Coast Guard can be traced back to 1789. But it wasn't until 1854 that Congress appropriated money for stationing lifeboats along the shores of the Great Lakes. Lack of a clear government policy, personnel, and training made these early congressional efforts almost useless. Finally, after many fatal shipping disasters during the winter of 1870-71, Congress appropriated enough money to establish life saving stations with paid crews and adequate equipment under the direction of a new Revenue Marine Bureau. By 1876, the new Life Saving Service began operating on the Great Lakes and stations were established along the Wisconsin shore of Lake Michigan by 1877. Early Life Saving Stations were small frame buildings with lookout towers, crew quarters, and a boat room with a launch. In 1915, Congress enacted legislation that merged the Revenue-Cutter Service with the Life-Saving

Service, forming the modern Coast Guard. The Coast Guard, currently administered under the U.S. Department of Transportation, provides important boating safety, rescue, and law enforcement services.

Kenosha's first Life Saving Station was established in 1879 and was typical of early life saving stations along the Great Lakes with a small crew in charge of a life boat, a surf boat, and a life car. By 1900, they had a professional crew that engaged in patrolling the shoreline, rescues, and rescue training. In 1907, the station received its first motorized life boat, and in 1915, it became part of the U.S. Coast Guard Service. By 1934, the old station was too small to handle modern crews and larger boats, and by November of 1934, a new (the current) Coast Guard Station was erected.

Kenosha's Coast Guard Station is architecturally significant because there are only a few historic Coast Guard Stations in Wisconsin, and it can provide information on the type of structures that were built for this important maritime service during the mid-twentieth century. For example, the Colonial Revival details were probably used on the crew's residence to give the building a New England appearance, a motif frequently used in Great Lakes lighthouses and stations. The size, shape, and features of the building can also give us an understanding of pre-World War II Coast Guard facilities.

The Station is historically significant because it reflects the growth and development of the modern Coast Guard and is a direct descendant of the Life Saving Station of Kenosha, which served this area of Lake Michigan for over 100 years. Protecting mariners in the Great Lakes has been important for shipping and recreational boating since the first Life Saving Stations were erected. The transition to the modern U.S. Coast Guard is also significant, as it reflects the modernization of this important service. The Kenosha Coast Guard buildings reflect this modernization and are important maritime landmarks in the community.

We invite you to drive along Kenosha's lakeshore to experience this historic landmark while taking in the picturesque view of Lake Michigan, our lighthouses, and the beautiful shoreline.

