

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Caffeys Inlet Lifesaving Station

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER E side SR 1200, 0.8 miles from Currituck County line

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Duck

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st

STATE

North Carolina

CODE

37

COUNTY

Dare

CODE

55

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Mr. Earl Slick

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 5746

CITY, TOWN

Winston-Salem

VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina 27103

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Dare County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Manteo

STATE

North Carolina

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Caffey's Inlet Lifesaving Station is an almost unaltered example of what in 1917 was known as "a modern coast guard station."<sup>1</sup> Built in the shingle style, the frame station is covered with wooden shingles. This style is most compatible with the topography of the seashore; the easy subtle transition of roof to lookout tower allows the building to fit unobtrusively into the undulating patterns of the nearby sanddunes. The functional requirements of the building can be observed in the hipped-roof lookout tower where the crew kept watch, and in the broad openings serviced by ramps behind which the rescue boots and carts were housed. Water tanks and a structure of unknown function remain around the station.

Sited between the ocean and the sound on a narrow stretch of land, the station is positioned parallel to the shores. The rectangular building has a wood shingle roof which forms a gable at the south end and converts to a hip at the north. The base of the lookout tower, located near the north end of the building, flares out to make the transition. The tower is square in section and covered with a small deck-on-hip roof. An interior brick chimney rises through the roof ridge mid-way between the tower and the south gable end.

Hip roof porches across the south halves of each side are connected by a shed roof porch along the south end. Chamfered posts support the porch roof, which has no ceiling; the rafters are exposed and the ends cut in a decorative pattern. The central portion of the west porch was enclosed as early as 1920, but is visually tied to the building through the use of wooden shingles.

The fenestration is irregular owing to the use of the southern end and second level as office and living space and the northern end as boat and equipment storage area. Unless otherwise noted, the window sash are double hung six-over-two contained in molded frames. Gable dormers, a small one on each of the east and west sides, and a large one on the north containing a pair of sash, pierce the roof. The south end has the following openings at the first level: two doors and four windows (one being a small high opening; at the second level, two windows, and a four-over-four sash in the gable. Two windows light the north end of the boat storage area. On the west side are a window, two standard doors and two large openings equipped with board and batten double doors mounted on strap hinges; concrete ramps service the large doors. The east side has three windows and a large opening like those described above.

Inside, the northern half is taken up by the boat room and the southern by a bedroom and bath for the officer in charge (southwest corner), the crew's bath (southwest corner), and crew's room and the office. In the northeast corner of the living area, a stair rises in two flights with a square landing. It is an open string stair with a molded handrail which neither ramps nor eases and abuts a turned newel. At the second level, the northern section is divided into an unfinished storage room on the east and a spare room on the west. The southern end contains the dormitory with closets in the eaves. The stair to the attic and to the lookout is a ladder type.

Most of the walls of the first floor living quarters are finished with tongue and groove ceiling from a molded baseboard up to a chair rail and plaster above. This wall treatment is carried through the stair. In the bathrooms, and in the second floor dormitory, plaster is used instead of the tongue and groove ceiling. Some of the boat

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room walls are completely sheathed with ceiling--vertical below the chair rail and horizontal above. At intervals round columns interrupt the boat room to support the ceiling. Door and window frames are symmetrically molded with roundel cornerblocks. A variety of doors is used in the station: doors with pairs of vertical raised panels occur at the closets in the dormitory; doors with four raised panels are used on the boat room corner closets and with six raised panels at room divisions. Other types are used randomly.

Adjacent to the station are three cylindrical wooden tanks, two of which retain conical roofs topped by finials. To the south is a rectangular frame building with weatherboarding and shingled hip roof. The fenestration is irregular and the use uncertain. At one time several other support buildings were located to the north and an auxiliary observation tower to the northeast. The entire compound was enclosed by a picket fence.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Annual report of the Coast Guard 1917, Plate III.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES      1897      BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Caffey's Inlet Lifesaving Station was one of seven lifesaving stations established on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in 1874, to serve the ships that were lost in the treacherous waters off the North Carolina coast. The present building, evidently that mentioned in the 1897-1898 report of "reconstructing" the station, is a well-preserved example of the functional, picturesque shingled stations typical of the early twentieth century. The station recalls a colorful and often heroic era in the history of the Outer Banks.

The United States Lifesaving Service, an agency of the Treasury Department, was created in 1847 when it established its first stations on the coast of New Jersey. In 1854 the Secretary of the Treasury authorized the creation of new lifesaving outposts along the coasts of New Jersey, Long Island, and on the Great Lakes. For about two decades activities of the Service were restricted to those areas. After the Civil War, however, there was an increase in the number of ships that were using the shipping lanes off the North Carolina coast. Many of these ships were lost there because of the treacherous and turbulent waters of the Outer Banks. Such a precarious condition resulted from the meeting off the North Carolina coast of the warm waters of the north-bound Gulf Stream and the cold waters coming down from the Labradore Current. The frequency of shipwrecks around Cape Hatteras has earned for the area the name, "graveyard of the Atlantic."

As a result of the increase in shipwrecks occurring there, the Lifesaving Service in 1874 expanded its operations to include the North Carolina coast. In that year it completed the construction of seven lifesaving stations on the Outer Banks. These structures were located at Jones's Hill, Nags Head, Bodies Island, Little Kinnakeet, Chicamacomico, and Caffey's Inlet. By 1881 these North Carolina outposts were among 189 such stations in use in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Caffey's Inlet, the site of one of these lifesaving stations, derived its name from George Caffee who in 1788 purchased a hundred acres of land north of the present village of Duck in Dare County. Not long after the purchase a small inlet cut through his property. According to historian David Stick, "this inlet was known as Caffee's Inlet at the time--and also as Providence Inlet--and remained open for only a comparatively short period, though it has threatened to open again on several occasions." The site of the station was deeded to the Treasury Department by Hodges Gallup of Dare County in 1874.<sup>3</sup>

The equipment and rescue procedures for lifesaving stations were standard throughout the Service. Rescues were generally made in one of two ways. If the surf was dangerously

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high or the vessel wrecked close to shore, a Lyle gun was used. The Lyle gun was a bronze cannon mounted on wheels which fired an eighteen-inch projectile with an attached line and a range of 500 yards. The surfmen on shore fired the projectile over the wreck, and a three inch hawser (rope) was drawn out to the vessel with the attached line and secured to the wreck. Underneath the hawser rode the rescue device known as the breeches buoy, a life ring with trouser legs. One victim at a time could be pulled ashore in the breeches buoy by the rescuers on the beach.

But the most spectacular rescues were made with surfboats. A horse and wagon pulled the boat across the beach to the surf. Until the early 1900s the boats were powered only by oars, since before the invention of the internal combustion engine, machinery was too cumbersome to be effective. Lifesaving crews referred to rowing as using "armstrong engines." Once a surfboat was launched into the pounding surf, the crew faced the exhausting task of rowing to the disabled vessel to rescue its occupants. The use of<sup>4</sup> engines and self-bailing boats made rescue operations easier and more efficient.

In the early days of the lifesaving Service, its stations were only manned in the winter months, but by the 1920s they were staffed year round. A proper watch was kept at all hours by the surfmen, and it included both a stationary lookout in the tower of the station and a beach lookout who walked a prescribed patrol on the beach, traveling to a certain point and then returning to the station. At Caffey's Inlet walking the beach patrol meant that each lookout standing that duty covered a total of seven miles during his watch. Upon sighting a ship in distress the lookout lighted a coston light to notify the ship that aid was being summoned, and the surfmen then began their operations--usually either using the Lyle gun or the surfboat depending on the weather and the position of the incapacitated vessel. Lookouts also fired flares on many occasions to warn ships that they were getting too close to land and might run aground.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the years it was in operation the Caffey's Inlet Station provided valuable routine service to ships and mariners operating off the North Carolina coast. But probably its most notable rescue came in 1883.

It was in that year that the Italian ship Angela carrying iron ore was damaged by rough weather and began sinking near Gamiel's Hill, south of Caffey's Inlet. The nine crew members abandoned ship into a yawl and managed to row north until they were in sight of Caffey's Inlet Station. Sighting the yawl the men of the station sprang into action, and, despite a turbulent surf which caused their lifeboat to "ship a barrel of water or more," they launched the craft beyond the breakers and sped to the rescue. They reached the distressed yawl, removed five of the sailors, brought them safely to shore, and then returned to rescue the remaining crew members. The men<sup>6</sup> of the Angela were saved, but the vessel was lost along with its cargo of iron ore.

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By the end of the century the Caffey's Inlet station had fallen into considerable disrepair. Evidently a new facility was constructed in 1897-1898 when the Annual Report of the U. S. Life Saving Service reported that the Caffey's Inlet station was "in process of reconstruction." (This is the building which is now standing.) In January, 1915, the United States Congress passed a law that combined the Lifesaving Service with the Revenue Cutter Service under the name of the Coast Guard. Prior to that law both services had been separate agencies of the Treasury Department.

Following the reorganization the station continued to render valuable service to Mariners and shipping on the Outer Banks. Its services continued throughout World War I and the 1920s and 1930s; however its days were numbered. By 1939 the number of shipwrecks and vessels in distress had decreased drastically and the station saw little service. This was also true during World War II despite the fact that German submarines sank several ships off the Outer Banks in the first six months of the conflict. One of these, the American tanker Byron D. Benson, was sunk off Caffey's Inlet in April, 1942. Its survivors, however, "vanished in a lifeboat in a sea of blazing oil" apparently before rescuers could reach them. But the use of antisubmarine defenses soon thwarted German efforts to hinder shipping off the east coast of the United States.

New ship construction and the disappearance of sailing vessels has eliminated much of the danger involved in coastal navigation. As one historian of the Lifesaving Service has written, the "shift from sail to steam to gasoline is just one manifestation of the slow and hardly noticeable evolution that has caused the word shipwreck to be associated in man's mind with the dim past." The introduction of such modern equipment as amphibious ducks, airplanes, helicopters, radio, and radar have made obsolete such lonely outposts as Caffey's Inlet. Today rescue operations can be conducted from modern shore-based facilities, and ships plot their courses far out to sea, avoiding the treacherous waters of the Outer Banks. Since the Caffey's Inlet station was no longer a vital part of its rescue operations, having outlived its usefulness, the Coast Guard abandoned it in the late 1950s.

In 1965 the Federal Government sold the site to Pine Island, Inc. who sold it to Carl P. White seven years later. White's widow sold the property to Earl F. Slick in March, 1977, and Mr. Slick presently plans to use the station as a restaurant while appropriately preserving it as one of North Carolina's most exciting historic properties.

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Howard U. L. Bloomfield, The Compact History of the United States Coast Guard (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1966), pp. 123-124; Darrell Hevenar Smith and Fred Wilbur Powell, The Coast Guard: Its History, Activities and Organization; Service Monographs of the United States Government No. 51 (Washington: Institute for Government Research, 1929), pp. 30-32; David Stick, Graveyard of the Atlantic: Shipwrecks of the North Carolina Coast (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Smith and Powell, The Coast Guard, pp. 29-30; Bloomfield, The Compact History, p. 124; David Stick, The Outer Banks of North Carolina, 1584-1958 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), p. 285.

<sup>3</sup>Stick, The Outer Banks, p. 260; Dare County Records, Dare County Courthouse, Manteo, North Carolina, Subgroup: Deeds, Deed Book 37:522-523, hereinafter cited as Dare Deed Books.

<sup>4</sup>Bloomfield, The Compact History, pp. 124-126.

<sup>5</sup>Stick, The Outer Banks, p. 173; David Stick, Dare County: A History (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1973), p. 28; Bloomfield, The Compact History, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup>Stick, Graveyard of the Atlantic, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup>Annual Report of the Operations of the U. S. Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1897 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1898), p. 59; Smith and Powell, The Coast Guard, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup>Stick, Graveyard of the Atlantic, pp. 228-229, p. 237.

<sup>9</sup>U. S. Treasury Department-U. S. Coast Guard, "Report of Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station," by Edwin C. Bearss, Part IV, pp. 260-261, (Raleigh: Federal Records (microfilm) Division of Archives and History); Stick, Graveyard of the Atlantic, pp. 228-229.

<sup>10</sup>Dare County Deed Books, 127:679; 187:23; 243:916.



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Smith, Darrell Hevenar and Powell, Fred Wilbur. The Coast Guard: Its History, Activities and Organization. Service Monographs of the United States Government No. 51. Washington: Institute for Government Research, 1929.

Stick, David. Dare County: A History. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1973.

Graveyard of the Atlantic: Shipwrecks of the North Carolina Coast. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952.

The Outer Banks of North Carolina, 1584-1958. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958.

U. S. Treasury Department-U. S. Coast Guard. "Report of Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station." By Edwin C. Bearss. Raleigh: Federal Records, microfilm, Division of Archives and History.

