



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Station Evanston, Illinois

Also referred to as Grosse Point; later-Wilmette Harbor

USLSS Station #12, Eleventh District
Coast Guard Station # 12

Location:	On the Northwestern University campus grounds, Lake Michigan
Date of Conveyance:	1874
Station Built:	The station was put into operation on 12 August 1877; originally named Station #8.
Fate:	Station still in operation but the name was changed to Wilmette Harbor and moved to Wilmette Harbor in 1931. The original station reverted to Northwestern University--the original grantor.

Remarks:

Organized life-saving along the North Shore began in October, 1871. Commodore Murray, USN, gave Northwestern University a 26-foot pulling boat to be manned by volunteer students. This action was prompted by the sinking of the *Lady Elgin* on 8 September 1860 (with the loss of 300 lives), the *Storm* in 1864, and the *Arrow* in 1869.

A boat house was built and completed in 1876 (18 Stat. 125) and was known as the University Station #12. With the creation of the Life-Saving Service in 1878, Captain Lawrence O. Lawson was appointed keeper in July 1880, bringing the station under government supervision. Prior to that time, some records indicate that Edwin John Bickell served for a year as the person in charge of the station prior to Lawson's appointment. The keeper of the station was then the only paid position, as the crew consisted solely of volunteers recruited from Northwestern University.

One crew gained national notoriety after the *Calumet* rescue in November of 1889 and each received a Gold Lifesaving Medal.

Around 1898, the station was renamed the Evanston Lifesaving Station #12. In January 1915, with the creation of the Coast Guard, the use of volunteer crews at Evanston was discontinued in favor of utilizing full-time, paid, crews, effective on 1 August 1915. The station's name was later changed once again to the Evanston Lifeboat Station #12. The station buildings were heavily damaged in a violent storm in March, 1929 and Evanston Lifeboat Station was permanently closed on 8 June 1931. The Wilmette Harbor Lifeboat Station opened that same day. The buildings and the land were returned to Northwestern University.

The Northwestern University Archives has a video presentation on the history of this station and the university students who manned it:

www.library.northwestern.edu/news/archives/001782.html

Wilmette Harbor [Taken from a detailed report by James Wall, USCGR]

Coast Guard Station Wilmette Harbor is located in Wilmette, Illinois. It was opened on June 8, 1931. This station replaced the old Evanston Station that had grown out of lifeboats operated by student of Northwestern University in the 1870s. The property was returned to the university. Wilmette Lifeboat Station, better known as Wilmette Harbor Station fell under the jurisdiction of the Chicago Division of the Northern Area District after the reorganization of 1935.

A tragic incident occurred in Wilmette Harbor in early May 1951 that cost the lives of the pilot of a crashed plane and of five men from a rescue crew manning a vessel from the Navy's Great Lakes Training Center. Wilmette Station had been closed since October of 1950 because of the shoaling of the channel entrance to the harbor. The station, which may have been permanently closed otherwise was once again deemed necessary and reopened during the last week of May.

In the night of October 28, 1951, between 1 and 2 a.m. radio contact was lost to CG 30315, manned by BM3 Robert Sawyer and EN1 Max Wage. The vessel was out on the lake to search for a hull with three duck hunters that was reported missing. The hull was found a half-mile off the Waukegan Harbor entrance. One of the hunters' bodies was recovered, the others were lost. CG 30315 was never found. Wilmette Harbor Station personnel participated in the search for United Airlines Flight 380 that had crashed into Lake Michigan on August 16, 1965. All 24 passengers and 8 crew members of the plane from LaGuardia headed for O'Hare Airport were dead.

Keepers:

Edwin John Bickell, Surfman No. 1 of the Evanston Station, served as the officer in charge beginning in 1877. He was replaced in 1880.

Captain Lawrence O. Lawson (G) was appointed keeper on 14 JUL 1880 and was discharged for physical reasons on 16 JUL 1903. [He died on 29 October 1912.]

Captain Patrick Murray was appointed keeper on 11 JUL 1903 and was discharged on 10 DEC 1904.

Captain Peter Jensen was appointed keeper 17 JAN 1905 and left in 1915.

BMC (L) Olaf Egeland was appointed keeper in 1915 and served into 1916.

BMC (L) Charles Carland served from 1916 and served until 1924.

BMC (L) Otto W. Fricke served from 1924-1931.

Other Sources:

Michael I. Kelly, "Captain Lawrence O. Lawson: An Evanston Legend." Vol. XI, No. 2 *Evanston Historical Newsletter* (March-April 1980); pp. 1-3.

Sources:

Station History File, CG Historian's Office

Dennis L. Noble & Michael S. Raynes. "Register of the Stations and Keepers of the U.S. Life-Saving Service." Unpublished manuscript, compiled circa 1977, CG Historian's Office collection.

Ralph Shanks, Wick York & Lisa Woo Shanks. *The U.S. Life-Saving Service: Heroes, Rescues and Architecture of the Early Coast Guard*. Petaluma, CA: Costaño Books, 1996.

U.S. Treasury Department: Coast Guard. *Register of the Commissioned and Warrant Officers and Cadets and Ships and Stations of the United States Coast Guard, July 1, 1941*. Washington, DC: USGPO, 1941.

