

# North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort

## The Old Bogue Inlet Lifesaving Station

By Ben Wunderly

Along the sandy shores of Bogue Banks, at the extreme western end of the island, there remains a memory of a building that sat quietly with men watching and waiting to rescue mariners in trouble. Whether it was due to a storm, an unexpected sandbar or malfunctioning equipment, these men were always at the ready and trained daily for any such response. Though they might not have seen as much action as their counterparts at more exposed locations further up the Outer Banks, they still required the same level of vigilance.

The Bogue Inlet Lifesaving Station was the last structure to be built in North Carolina by the United States Lifesaving Service. The station was authorized by the U.S. Congress on March 10, 1902, and officially opened on February 5, 1905. Roughly ten years later, the Lifesaving Service merged with the United States Marine Revenue Service to form the U. S. Coast Guard.

The station at Bogue Inlet was located about one half mile east of its namesake inlet and was practically all alone on this remote stretch of beach. The first crewmembers stationed there got to enjoy a new prototype structure, much roomier and more substantial than the early glorified boat sheds of the stations built before 1900. A bungalow style building with a covered porch and a tall square lookout tower, these structures

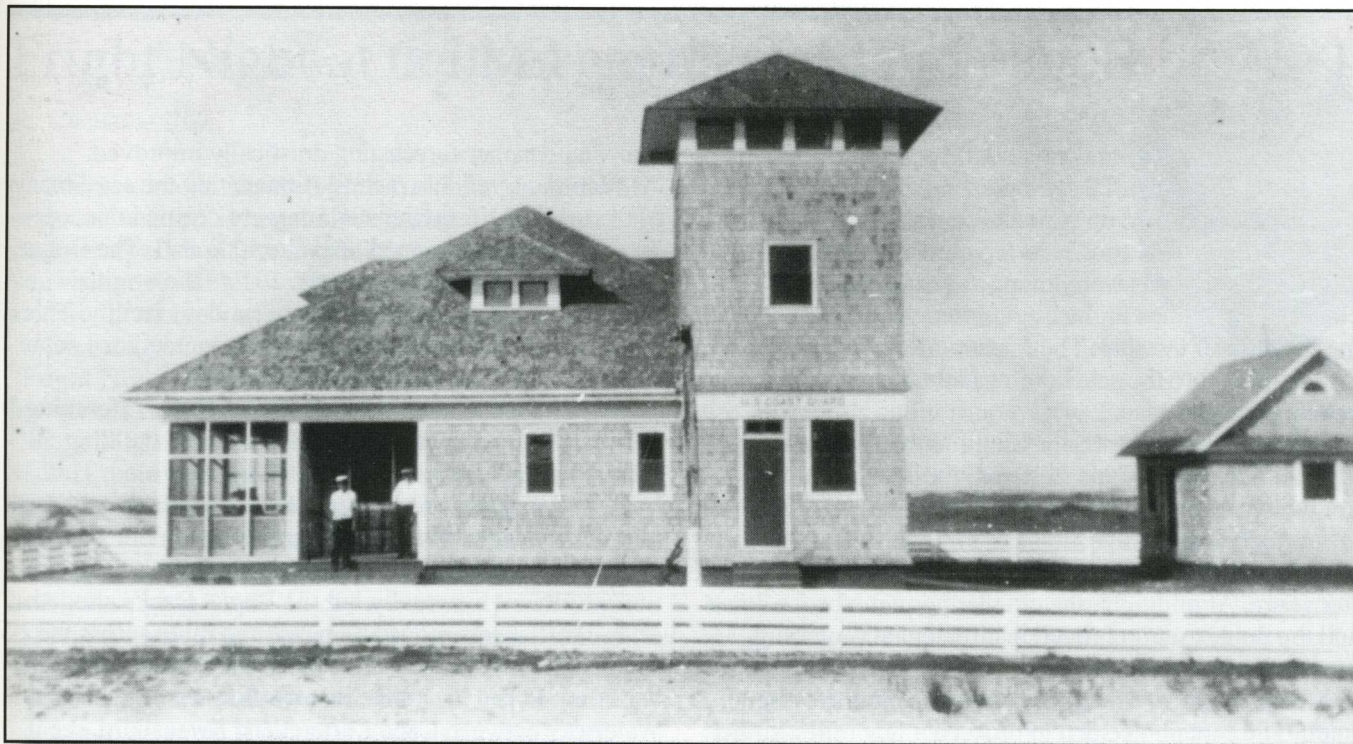
were most likely the inspiration for some early vacation cottages.

The surfmen of the U. S. Lifesaving Service were well equipped and very accurate with their maneuvers by the time the Bogue Inlet Lifesaving Station was completed. Many harrowing rescues had played out over the first three decades of the service's existence, so a number of efficient crewmembers to staff the new station was easy to come by. The first head keeper of the newly built Bogue Inlet Lifesaving Station was Alexander Moore, who came from a long line of watermen whose roots could be traced back to some of the hardy fishermen and whalers of Shackleford Banks. Following in the footsteps of his father, Tyre, Alexander had enlisted in the Lifesaving Service in 1896 and served at the Core Banks Station before he was appointed head keeper at Bogue Inlet on September 17, 1904. He kept the position until June 15, 1915.

The records and accounts at each station reported the responses and aid to mariners no matter how big or small the



*This photo taken circa 1910 shows the crew from the Bogue Inlet Lifesaving Station training on the waters of Bogue Inlet near Swansboro. Photo courtesy NC Division of Archives and History.*

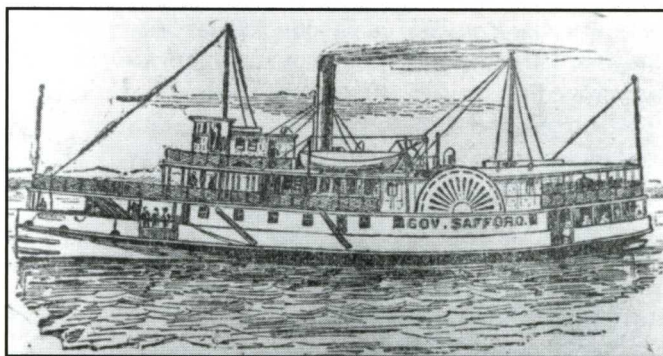


This is an undated photograph of the old Bogue Inlet Lifesaving Station. Photo courtesy NC Division of Archives and History.

event. You can find such entries from Bogue Inlet like, *March 18, 1905 A vessel standing close to the beach was warned off by two Coston signals burned at intervals of thirty-five minutes., or, December 3, 1906 Sea was too high for launch to cross in over the bar, so her occupants anchored 1 mile S. of the station and landed in their tender. The next day the surfboat towed her into the inlet.*

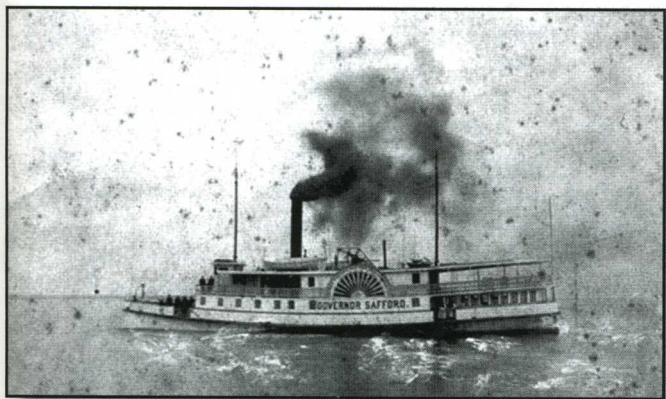
Even though these uneventful situations may seem minor, they could easily have evolved into something much more treacherous. Approaching a stranded vessel at night and attempting a rescue during high seas are matters that should not be taken lightly. It was always better to signal every possible warning in order to prevent such a situation from happening in the first place.

The most thrilling nautical incident to occur at Bogue Inlet during the early years of the lifesaving station's existence was the sinking of a steamboat just offshore. The *Governor Safford* was a wooden-hulled side-wheel



steamer built in 1884. Her length was 129.6 feet and she had a beam of 26 feet. The vessel was powered by a single cylinder steam engine with a 28 inch bore. She was built in Camden, New Jersey, and spent her early years operating in Florida making trips between Cedar Key, Manatee and Clearwater Village as a passenger vessel owned by the Gulf S.B. Co. out of Madisonville, Louisiana. Later the steamer spent several years in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century carrying passengers along the Waccamaw River between Georgetown and Pawleys Island, South Carolina.

At the time just before her loss she was laid up in Georgetown, and was registered as being owned by the Atlantic Coast Lumber Corporation. In July of 1908, the *Governor Safford*, under the command of Captain Dick Turpin, was to be towed by the steamer *Katahdin*, of the same owner, to Cape Henry where they would part ways, the *Katahdin* would continue to Baltimore, Maryland and the *Governor Safford* to New York. In order to make better time, the *Safford* would also use its own power while being towed. The voyage started early on the morning of July 23, 1908. The sea was calm and there was a light east wind. At 1:30 that afternoon they passed the *continued...*



The steamer Governor Safford is shown here circa 1890 along the waterways of central Florida. Images courtesy State Library and Archives of Florida.

# The Old Bogue Inlet Lifesaving Station ...continued

Frying Pan Shoals Lightship under frequent rain squalls but still smooth seas. That would soon change. At 4:30 p.m. the wind picked up from the east southeast and the waves started to get rough. At 6 p.m. it was noticed that the starboard guards were giving way and the debris was clogging the pumps in the bilge, soon water would be filling the hold of the ship. The *Katahdin* was hailed to keep the vessel before the sea, but it was found that they made better time otherwise.

When the steamer was passing roughly between Frying Pan Shoals and Cape Lookout, the weather conditions got worse. At 9 p.m. the tow line gave way and the *Governor Safford* was forced to steer for land in fear that she would not last much longer. Things would only get worse from here. At midnight, the circulating pump broke down and the duplex pump proved insufficient at providing proper water pressure through the condenser. Come daylight that Friday morning, the vessel was just off Bogue Inlet. The captain decided to proceed a few miles further and make way for the Beaufort Inlet, but progress was slow due to the engine overheating and shutting down frequently. The water in the fire room was up to three feet by now as the *Katahdin* came alongside to secure another tow line. This attempt to pull the struggling *Governor Safford* proved futile. At 7:30 a.m. the crew of the distressed vessel abandoned ship. Instead of rowing ashore and seeking refuge at the lifesaving station at Bogue Inlet, they rowed the lifeboat to the *Katahdin*.

An article in the July 30, 1908 edition of the *News and Courier*, a newspaper published in Charleston, South Carolina, gave an account of the whole ordeal. "From the *Katahdin* we watched the last struggle of the *Governor Safford* and at 11:30 a.m. she sank off Bogue Inlet," said Captain John G. Smith Chief Engineer on board the *Governor Safford*. "Then as if the boilers and engines had dropped to bottom, the bow once, more rose, and falling upon the waters of the ocean with her starboard side entirely submerged, the *Governor Safford* departed for the bottom of the ocean and was seen no more."

Captain Turpin later reported that the *Governor Safford* went down at latitude 34° 87'N, longitude 77° 6' W. No one has yet found the wreck of the ill-fated steamer, and she still rests where she went down in about seven fathoms, roughly four miles off the outer bar of Bogue Inlet.

The years went on at the quiet location on the western end of the island, but changes were on the way for the station. New keepers and crewmembers would come and go. New equipment such as motor powered rescue boats and radio communication gear would vastly improve the ability to save lives. The service merged into the United States Coast Guard and left the Department of the Treasury for the Department of Transportation. New threats to shipping close to home would arise during the World Wars with the German use of *Unterseebooten*, and the men of the Lifesaving Stations stepped up their vigilant watch. New technology developed to aid in ship naviga-

tion, and weather forecasting drastically improved.

With more reliable means of traversing the seas, many of the original lifesaving stations were deemed unnecessary and decommissioned after World War II. The Bogue Inlet Station remained, but in the 1940's the original structure was replaced with a more modern facility. This building still stands today, and has even undergone some renovations in the last few years.

But what happened to the old Bogue Inlet Lifesaving Station? Once there was no need for the old building, it was bought by a private individual and relocated. This happened to quite a few of the old structures; they became museums, beach cottages, restaurants and in one case a real estate office. The interesting thing about the old station was that it eventually left the Bogue Banks altogether. In 1950, it was moved by barge and mule across the sound almost to the mouth of the White Oak River to Cedar Point. If you happen to be travelling the Intracoastal Waterway between Cape Carteret and Swansboro, see if you can pick out this historic building amongst the condos and marinas. It is the one with distinguished charm and an admirable air. ■