Details of Historic Station Building and Marine Railway at Station Humboldt Bay

Station Building

The U.S. Coast Guard Station Humboldt Bay is considered to be the best example in the western United States of the Colonial Revival Style or 'Roosevelt Style' station, a standard building design used nationally by the Coast Guard. The size of the building is unusual and impressive. The building is a rare extant example of a Coast Guard Station that included the boat house in the station. In addition, the quality of its architectural detailing, such as the period exterior door and window moldings, classical columns, balustrades, gable brackets and ironwork, is especially fine. The building retains a high level of historic integrity on the exterior.

Marine Railway

The lifeboats at the Humboldt Bay Coast Guard Station would have originally been stored on a cart in the boat room at the central area of the first floor. Launching the boat involved lowering it down the railway to the water in a cart connected to a gasoline powered motor winch inside the building. Men on the walkways on each side of the rails would steady the boat on the cart with handling lines as it was lowered into the water. The boat was backed down the ramp so its motor entered the water first. The boat would float off the cart as the cart followed the rails into the water. When the boat returned, it was settled on the cart (posts on each side of the cart helped guide it) and the winch would pull the cart with the boat back to the boat room. Given that the Humboldt Bay Station had three rails for boats from the three-bay boat room connecting to double rails on the ramp, multiple boats could be launched from or returned to the boat room.

The marine railway was designed and built according to station's original 1936 plans. The marine railway or boat launch ramp extends 274' east from the building's center roll-up doors (which originally opened into the boat room). The ramp has two steel 60-pound rail tracks set on 20 bents set on wooden pilings. Each of the 25' wide bents is supported by three wooden pilings spaced approximately 12' apart. The 20 bents with pilings are spaced 11' 10" apart from west to east. The 31' of ramp adjacent to the shore has wood plank decking under the track. Up the slope from wood plank decking, the tracks are set into reinforced concrete paving before they enter the station.

The two railways slope down into Humboldt Bay. The rails themselves are set on 10" by 12" wooden beams set on the bents. Each railway has two individual rails 5' 9"apart. A single set of rails is on the south and a double set of rails is on the north. One set of the northern rails curves to the north continuing to the northernmost opening into the boat room. The two rails to the south continue directly west to the middle or southern openings into the boat room. The rails begin to submerge in the water between the ninth and tenth bents, about 100' from the shore. According to the 1936 plans, the rails terminated at a point where they would have been approximately 7' under water at median low tide.

Flanking the tracks are two side walkways and a narrow center catwalk, both with 6" by 3" wood plank decking. Men on the walkways and the catwalk helped guide the boats into the water. The center catwalk is about 18" wide and it extends out about 60' from the shore, supported by six wooden pilings. The walkway, initially about 3' wide, increases in width to about 5' at the eleventh bent to the east. Each walkway is constructed on 6" by 12" joists set on nine bents with flanking pairs of pilings spaced east to west 23' 9"apart. A horizontal cross brace holds the two pilings together.

The handrails on the walkways were added later; they are not shown on the original plans, nor are they visible in historic views of the marine railway. The date of their construction is not known, but they

appear to date from the last 40 years.

By the 1920s, the marine railway had become a common feature of Coast Guard stations. Maritime historian Timothy Dring identifies the marine railway for launching boats directly into the water at protected locations such as harbor entrances, inlets and coves as one the “design hallmarks” of the “Roosevelt Style” Coast Guard stations of the 1930s and 1940s. The bright white painted station houses and boathouses, along with the typical motor lifeboat and surfboat on the ramp, served for many years as the well-recognized symbol of the coastal rescue mission of the Coast Guard.1

The marine railways became obsolete when the Coast Guard switched in the 1970s to much larger 44-foot long steel lifeboats. The 44-foot boats, too large and heavy to haul from a boat house station, were stored in separate boat houses built over the water. The 36-foot boats adapted to the marine railways have been phased out. Consequently, the marine railways have largely been removed from Coast Guard stations throughout the United States. Humboldt Bay is the only operating United States Coast Guard Station on the Pacific Coast with an extant marine railway.

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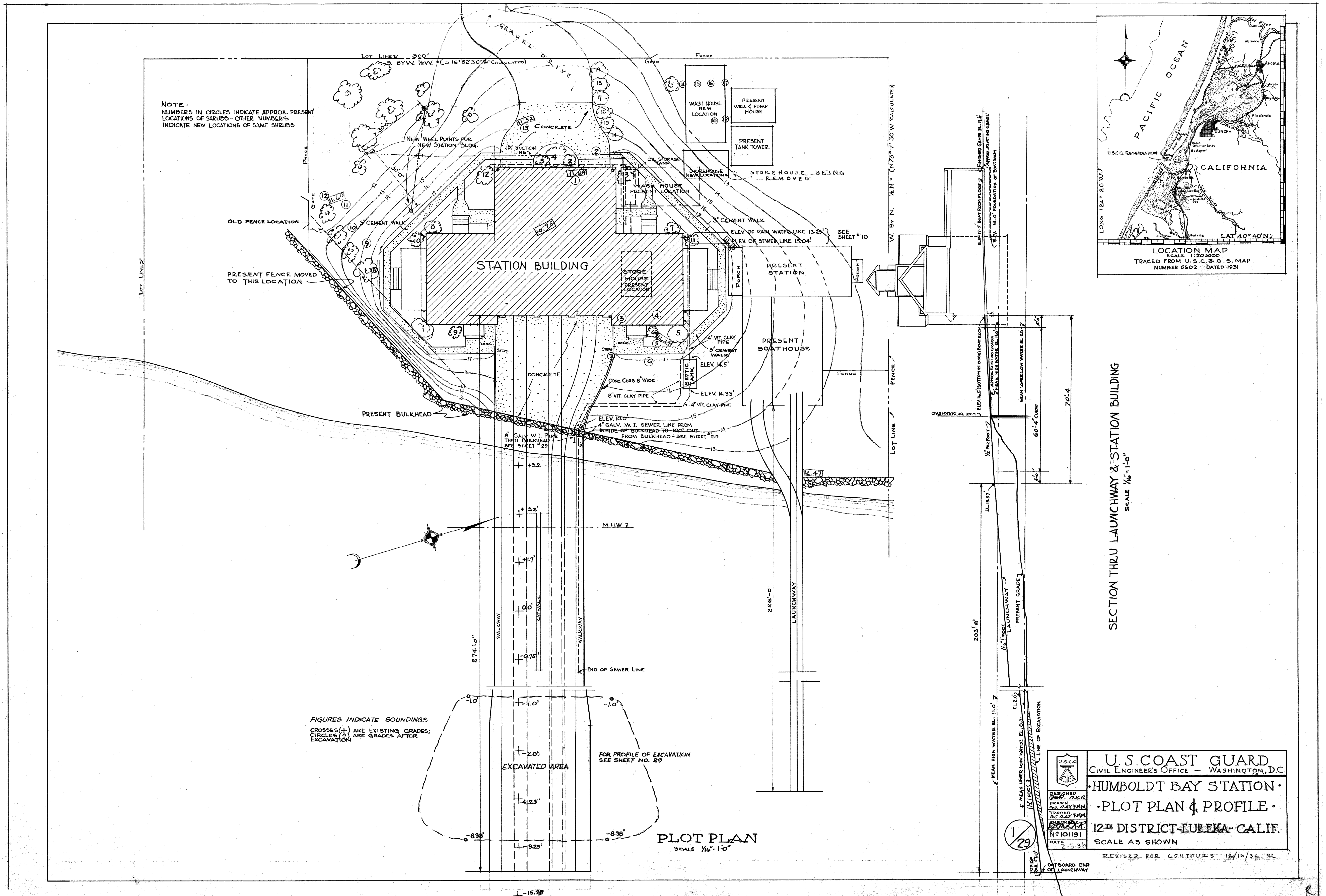
NOTE:
NUMBERS IN CIRCLES INDICATE APPROX. PRESENT LOCATIONS OF SHRUBS - OTHER NUMBERS INDICATE NEW LOCATIONS OF SAME SHRUBS
LOT LINE 300'
S. BYW. ½W. = (S 16°52'30"W-CALCULATED)
W. BY N. ½N = (N73°7'30"W CALCULATED)
GRAVEL DRIVE
FENCE
GATE
NEW WELL POINTS FOR NEW STATION BLDG.
30'-0"
CONCRETE
1¼" SUCTION LINE
OIL STORAGE TANK
WASH HOUSE NEW LOCATION
PRESENT WELL & PUMP HOUSE
PRESENT TANK TOWER
STOREHOUSE NEW LOCATION
STOREHOUSE BEING REMOVED
WASH HOUSE PRESENT LOCATION
OLD FENCE LOCATION
3" CEMENT WALK
PRESENT FENCE MOVED TO THIS LOCATION
LOT LINE
STATION BUILDING
STORE HOUSE PRESENT LOCATION
ELEV. OF RAIN WATER LINE 13.25'
ELEV. OF SEWER LINE 15.04'
SEE SHEET #10
PORCH
PRESENT STATION
PRESENT BOATHOUSE
4" VIT. CLAY PIPE
3' CEMENT WALK
ELEV. 14.5'
SEPTIC TANK
CONC. CURB 8" WIDE
8" VIT. CLAY PIPE
ELEV. 14.33'
4" VIT. CLAY PIPE
PRESENT BULKHEAD
ELEV. 10.0'
4" GALV. W. I. SEWER LINE FROM INSIDE OF BULKHEAD TO 100' OUT FROM BULKHEAD - SEE SHEET #29
8" GALV. W.I. PIPE THRU BULKHEAD SEE SHEET #29
STEPS
CONC.
12.47
M.H.W.
WALKWAY
CATWALK
274'-0"
226'-0"
LAUNCHWAY
END OF SEWER LINE
FIGURES INDICATE SOUNDINGS
CROSSES (+) ARE EXISTING GRADES; CIRCLES (o) ARE GRADES AFTER EXCAVATION
FOR PROFILE OF EXCAVATION SEE SHEET NO. 29
EXCAVATED AREA
+3.2
+3.2'
+1.7'
0.0'
-0.75'
-1.0'
-2.0'
-4.25'
-8.38'
-9.25'
-15.28
PLOT PLAN
SCALE 1/16" = 1'-0"
ELEV. 17.5' BOAT ROOM FLOOR
FINISHED GRADE EL. 17.0'
APPROX. EXISTING GRADE
ELEV. 14.0' FOUNDATION OF BOATROOM
ELEV. 16.5' (BOTTOM OF DOOR) BOATROOM
APPROX. EXISTING GRADE
MEAN HIGH WATER EL. 11.0'
MEAN LOWER LOW WATER EL. 0.0
LINE OF BULKHEAD
½" PER FOOT
60'-4" CURVE
5'-0"
70'-4
EL. 13.57'
203'-8"
1/16"/FOOT
LAUNCHWAY
PRESENT GRADE
EL. 2.0'
MEAN HIGH WATER EL. 11.0'
MEAN LOWER LOW WATER EL. 0.0
1½"/FOOT
LINE OF EXCAVATION
TOP OF RAIL -7.0'
OUTBOARD END OF LAUNCHWAY
SECTION THRU LAUNCHWAY & STATION BUILDING
SCALE 1/16" = 1'-0"
PACIFIC OCEAN
CALIFORNIA
Mad River
Alliance
Arcata
Jacobs Cr.
Bayside
Indianola
EUREKA
U.S.C.G. RESERVATION
Fields Landing
Elk River
Beatrice
LONG 124° 20' W
LAT 40° 40' N
LOCATION MAP
SCALE 1:203000
TRACED FROM U.S.C.&G.S. MAP
NUMBER 5602 DATED: 1931
U.S.C.G.
U.S. COAST GUARD
CIVIL ENGINEER'S OFFICE ~ WASHINGTON, D.C.
·HUMBOLDT BAY STATION·
·PLOT PLAN & PROFILE·
12TH DISTRICT-EUREKA-CALIF.
SCALE AS SHOWN
DESIGNED D.K.R.
DRAWN A.D.X. F.M.M.
TRACED A.D.X. F.M.M.
CHECKED D.K.R.
Nº 101191
DATE 2-3-36
1/29
REVISED FOR CONTOURS 12/16/36 HR