

THE LIFE SAVING SERVICE OF CAPE COD

A talk and Slides by Admiral Donald B. MacMillan
Introduction by Col. Eugene S. Clark.

Rear Admiral Donald B. MacMillan in his 91st year, indicated in April of 1965 that he would like to do a tape recording telling the story of the early lifesavers and Coastguardsmen of Cape Cod and of his association with these hardy men during his younger life before the turn of the century at the tip end of Cape Cod. The Admiral also expressed the wish, that this tape recording, along with more than 90 of his personal slides, be kept in the files of the Cape Cod National Seashore for use of researchers and use of future generations.

As a result of the Admiral's desire, Mr. Robert Gibb, Superintendent of the Cape Cod National Seashore, Mr. Vernon C. Gilbert, Chief Naturalist of the Cape Cod National Seashore, Mr. Bernard Collins of Eastham, a close friend of the Admiral and his Wife, and this speaker, Col. Eugene S. Clark of Sandwich visited Admiral and his wife at their beautiful home on Provincetown's waterfront on the morning of Thursday, April 29th, 1965. Mr. Gilbert and I both brought tape recorders so that we would have two originals tapes of the Admirals's story. Seated in front of a large picture window looking out on to Provincetown's Harbor was the Admiral in a comfortable chair. On the wall behind him was a beautiful oil portrait of him in his blue uniform. Just offshore in Provincetown Harbor, clearly visible from the picture window, was the Coastguard's beautiful white cutter 'Vigilant,' a perfect setting for doing a tape recorded story about the coast guard by a hardy old seafarer in his ninety-first year. The tape recorders tested the Admirals voice for strength and now in a silent picturesque room, we will next hear the voice of Rear-Admiral Donald B. MacMillan.

23
Time - 45 Min.
646 inches

THE LIFE SAVING SERVICE

by

Donald B. MacMillan

Preliminary

Shipwreck once meant almost certain loss of all on board. Today fewer than one percent of those aboard such ships perish. This remarkable record is due to the work of the United States Coast Guard. It rescues or assists some 9,000 persons a year!

Government Life Saving Stations were first set up on the coast in 1848. The Life Saving Service was combined with the Revenue Cutter Service in 1915 as the Coast Guard.

Today the Coast Guard maintains more than 200 life saving stations along some 10,000 miles of sea coast and the shores of the Great Lakes. This dangerous area is divided into thirteen districts. More than 125 stations follow the Atlantic coast and the Gulf of Mexico. Eight or ten surfmen and a Captain make up a station crew. They keep a close watch of the sea from high lookout towers and patrol the beaches during stormy or foggy weather.

When a patrolman sights a ship in distress, he signals the sailors on board with flare rockets to show that help is coming. Word goes out by telephone, telegraph, radio, or signal light to other stations and ships to stand by in case of need.

Then the Captain of the Coast Guard Station decides how best to make the rescue. This decision depends upon the time of day, state of weather, roughness of the sea, the direction and strength of the wind, and the distance of the wreck from the shore. If conditions are unfavorable for launching the surf boat, he may order his men to use the so-called Lyle Gun, which is capable of sending a nine pound projectile across the spring-stay or deck of the stranded ship at a distance of two and even three hundred yards. If the

crew of the stranded ship are able to reach this, they pull out a larger and stronger rope from shore, to which is fastened a small board, and on which are printed instructions as to just what they are to do. They are instructed to fasten the end of the stronger rope to the masthead. This having been done, communication with the beach has been established. A so-called "breeches-buoy" is now pulled off to the ship on an endless line. This is really a short pair of canvas trousers, attached to a life preserver. One and even two persons at a time have been rescued in this way -- pulled ashore high above the raging sea by the men on the beach. Metal life-care were once used in the same way but due to their weight, proved to be unsatisfactory.

At the present time the Coast Guard Stations use so-called "Ducks," which are heavily motored lifeboats, capable of land or sea travel. These ~~are~~ ~~motor~~ launches plunge into a raging sea and within a few minutes are beside a stranded ship. Not only upon the raging sea but are often called upon to assist neighboring station by proceeding along the highway.

In addition to these so-called "Ducks," all Coast Guard Stations are well equipped with self-bailing, self-righting lifeboats, motor driven craft 26 and even 35 ~~in~~ feet in length, and with automatic valves which empty out water as rapidly as it flows in. All are made buoyant by many water-tight compartments.

Air stations extend the patrol and rescue service of the Coast Guard far out to sea. Airplanes drop storm warnings to fishing vessels and other craft without radio equipment. Aviators may place a seaplane alongside a ship to rescue survivors or to fly ill or injured men ashore. They carry serum and medicines, and even physicians to sick mariners. The helicopters of the air-sea rescue service have metal litters attached to their floatation gear. When the pilot sees a raft carrying a victim of an air or sea disaster, he drops down and picks up the victim in the litter.

Although the Life Saving Service in the United States and Canada is maintained by the Government, in most other countries it is supported by

70 voluntary contributions. Canada has a number of government stations under the control of the Federal Government.

SLIDE 1 MAP OF CAPE COD

Here is what Henry David Thoreau, philosopher and author, has termed "the bare and bended arm of Cape Cod," its fist at Provincetown and its elbow at Monomoy, as if defying the tempestuous seas of the North Atlantic, which threaten to destroy the coastline of the Commonwealth. A sand point jutting out from the coast, a terminal moraine of the great ice sheet which crept down from the North, burying all of North America north of the 42nd parallel in a snowy white mantle.

Its back beach, its sandy shores were once known as "The graveyard of the North Atlantic". Some of the worst disasters in history have occurred here among the shoals and sand-bars common throughout its entire length. Every dot which you see on this slide represents a wreck, and, in general, loss of life.

SLIDE 2 SURF OF THE BACKSIDE

Throughout the winter months rough, tumultuous seas pound its outer shores unmercifully. Treacherous sand bars come and go. Soundings, depth of water, are not what are found recorded on the latest Government charts.

SLIDE 3 SURF ON THE BACKSIDE

In the so-called thick and foul weather, navigators in general always give the Cape a "Wide berth," knowing full well that "grounding" may result in loss of ship and, possibly, all on board.

slide 4 PROVINCETOWN HARBOR FULL OF ICE

From the time when the Pilgrims dropped anchor here in the MAYFLOWER in 1620, Provincetown has been known as one of the best harbors on the eastern coast, but not one word has been said about its dangers, resulting from heavy northeast winds, and, at times, following an extremely cold spell, the hazards encountered by contact with heavy drift ice from the Head of Massachusetts Bay. Subjected to pressure exerted by tides and winds, seaplanes are torn apart, the air and cargo and carried to the extreme, western

SLIDE 4 PROVINCETOWN HARBOR FULL OF ICE (Continued)

from the head of Massachusetts Bay. Subjected to pressure exerted by tides and winds, schooners are torn from their anchorage and carried to the extreme western end of the harbor onto shoal ground.

SLIDE 3 PROVINCETOWN

Provincetown, a colselly-packed assemblage of small wooden houses, stretching along the shoreline of its harbor, has had a most interesting history. It is somewhat facetiously said to be three miles long and two streets wlde. That is really what we are -- a narrow strip of the sandy shore of the harbor. All else is the property of the Commonwealth of ~~M~~ Massachusetts. On fact, the entire town belonged to the State until 1892. At that time for some reason or bther, the State consented to give us the Front Street and the Back Street, ~~two~~ narrow streets along the waterfront, now known as Commercial and Bradford Streets. All else still belongs to the State.

SLIDE 6 HOUSES AND WHITE DORY

Provincetown takes its name fro~~x~~m the fact that it was carved out of Provinc ~~Z~~ands, the name applied to the entire tip and of the Cape, once the property of the Plymouth Colony, to which many of the residents once returned each summer to fish. It was a collection of huts along the waterfront, inhabited by a lawless group, here today and gone tomorrow. Truso, the neighboring town refused to annex it. It was finally made a tow town in 1727.

SLIDE 7 WHEEL TRACKS OVER THE+DUNES

Back of the town are the rolling, shifting sand dunes, one of the many interesting sights of America. There is nothing quite like them any~~where~~ in this country. Sand brought by tides and currents from the lupper Cape finally appeared above the ~~w~~hite-capped waves. And then when dry, it was picked up by strong winds and blown into thses fantastic dunes.

SLIDE 8 ~~AF~~ A PORTUGUESE BOY

It may come as a surprise to you to know that Provincetown during its fishing and whaling days was known as a "Portuguese town," and directly due to these two industries it was known to be "The wealthiest town in the Commonwealth." Three-fourths were, in my day, Portuguese, seeking their living in fishing or indirectly from its earnings.

SLIDE 9 TWO PORTUGUESE BOYS

A large majority of the residents came from the Azores and are today descendants of these Azoreans, many of whom were unable to talk one word of English. Some of them came over from Lisbon. Others are descendants of the Bravas, a mixture of Portuguese and native African, and are so-called after the Island of Brava, the inhabitants of which are good fishermen and excellent whalers.

SLIDE 10 A FISH WEIR

In the early days there were no fish-traps or weirs, as they are known today, and no so-called "draggers." Consequently, many of the Portuguese became "dory fishermen." Out in the early morning with oars and sail to waters teeming with cod, from which, incidentally, the Cape takes its name, and also with haddock, flounders, whiting, lobsters, and now and then a halibut!

SLIDE 11 MAN IN DORY (A Painting by Winslow Homer)

This accounts for the fact that due to their love of the sea, many of them were found at the various life saving stations at which I spent weeks during my vacations when teaching.

During the summer months, after leaving Provincetown early in May, our fathers, often with a Portuguese crew, were on the Grand Banks or in Iceland, or in Greenland on the halibut grounds off Sukkertoppen and in the fall bringing home barrels of red salmon from the cold waters flowing southward from the Polar Sea!!

SLIDE 12 MAN AT WHEEL OF FISHING SCHOONER

And their thrilling stories of storms and huge icebergs drifting down upon their tiny schooners, and of menacing ocean liners bellowing in the fog when on their usual course from Europe to New York. What a relief from worry when maritime law compelled them to change their course!

SLIDE 13 THE "WATCH" CALLING

Calling, calling to the man at the wheel to change his course in order to avoid the schooner at anchor on the port bow. Portuguese schooners at anchor. Portuguese schooners as they were when the Pilgrims crossed the "Banks" in 1620. Possibly the fishing grounds, known as "The Banks" led them on to Provincetowne.

SLIDE 13A "DRESSING" COD AND HADDOCK

What a life! Ever busy day and night, fishing from the deck, from small dories, menaced by drift ice, and when not out in small dories" cleaning, washing, and packing fish below decks.

SLIDE 14 FISH ON FLAKES

With fathers at home, schooners anchored in the harbor, loaded dories arriving at the beach and fish flakes all up and down the street, on vacant lots and even drying on the docks! Yes, fish~~x~~ everywhere. Truly a fishing town and fishermen plying their ~~thxxx~~ trade, therefore men of the sea, the kind needed for the Life Saving Service. All of our stations were manned by such men.

SLIDE 15 ATTACKING A WHALE

The Captains of these Life Saving Stations were in general men of the sea and were often called upon to show their skill. Well do I remember the Captain of the Wood End Station and his limp, the result of a broken leg, broken by a blow from the tail of a whale right here in our harbor! With whaling days at an end, many of them joined the Life Saving Service.

Tucked away in a corner of a so--called "loafing room," I often listened with bated breath to exciting tales of how the whalboats, in which we played

SLIDE 15 ATTACKING A WHALE - Continued

day after day, approached these huge monsters, how these very men, now Captains of the Life Saving Stations which lined our shores, spent their early days whaling.

SLIDE 16 THE MORTAL BLOW

And then followed the mortal thrust, the huge body on its back spouting blood, and the boat within a few feet of the dying monster! Yes, powerful enough to crush the boat between its jaws!

SLIDE 17 A DEAD WHALE ON THE BEACH

I remember the huge "right whale" on the beach at Provincetown. And I remember the so-called whalingfactory on the Point, to which a small steamer brought its "catch" and the huge body, stripped of its blubber, floating about the harbor.

SLIDE 18 WHALES ON BEACH AT BREWSTER

"Bottle-nosed" whales, known as Blackfish were very common in our harbor years ago. In fact, the revenue derived often helped to pay the minister's salary, and even for the education of our youth. Well do I remember the large number on the beach at Brewster, left to die by the receding tide. It has been many years since I have seen one.

SLIDE 19 DEAD TREES ON THE DUNES

The big attraction for every Provincetown boy was the so-called "backside." And to reach it, we must travel out over the sand dunes, ever shifting, ever beautiful, and ever interesting despite our efforts to protect our faces from their stinging, cutting effect of heavy nor-west winds during the winter months. How interesting the dunes were! We often asked ourselves, "Where did all this sand come from?" Blown by the wind, it buried pine forests, as evidenced by the trunks still lifting their heads above the surface.

SLIDE 20 SNAKE TRACKS ON THE DUNES

One thing of many puzzled our young minds. A desolate waste and yet something alive as evidenced by the peculiar tracks. Then one day I found it lying right in his own tracks, basking in the warm sun - a Sand Adder, t

SLIDE 20 SNAKE TRACKS ON THE DUNES

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SLIDE 21 SURF ON THE BACKSIDE

How we loved the sight and roar and crash of the surf on the sandy beach! We gloried in the thought that our fathers had the courage to contend against such might and power, little foreseeing at the time that at last the mighty ocean would at a future date assert its superiority.

SLIDE 22 SURF AND A SAIL

Far beyond we often descried a sail rounding the dreaded Peaked Hill Bars, which were a menace to all ships bound to Boston. Those were the white-capped breakers which found the keep of the proud PERUVIAN, a full-rigged ship from Calcutta, the same which crowned its work of destruction during the Thanksgiving gale in November 1890. For days, yes, even weeks, the breaking white-topped waves rolled up the bodies of the dead. There was wreckage all up and down the beach from Race Point to Monomoy, a distance of some thirty miles.

SLIDE 23 HOUSE OF REFUGE

In the early days there were no life saving stations on the Atlantic Coast. Consequently, largely due to lack of power, wrecks were numerous, and especially so on the sandy shores of Cape Cod, for traffic was extremely heavy in and out of Boston. In lieu of such, kind hearted people established so-called "Humane Houses" for weak and cold and starving sailors who were fortunate enough to land upon the beach unassisted. Here they could at last find warmth and shelter.

SLIDE 23A ABANDONED HULKA

SLIDE 23A ABANDONED HULKS

Throughout my childhood abandoned hulks could be seen all up and down the shore. Where they came from we did not know. Even names were often erased. Piece by piece they yielded to the elements and slowly disappeared until nothing was left to mark their passing.

SLIDE 24 A BRIG AT THE WATER'S EDGE

The thrilling cry of "Wreck ashore on the Back-side!" was often heard at school recess, and even whispered across the isle. Impatiently we awaited the closing of the school session. Was it a ship or bark or brig from a foreign port, loaded with a rich cargo? Or was it one of the many fishing schooners running home from George's bank? Such were very common, bound in from the fishing ground southeast of Highland. Many succeeded in finding the Cape and were lost endeavoring to find shelter in the harbor of Provincetown.

SLIDE 25 A WRECK-SIDE GONE

Wreck of no wreck, the sandy beach was always of interest. Hulks were found throughout the extent from Race Point to the elbow of the Cape.

SLIDE 26 THREE MEN AND RIBS OF WRECK

At times nothing but the ribs remained. Piece by piece of this craft had been torn into bits. Even the name was gone. We were unable to form an inkling as to her identity.

SLIDE 27 REMAINS OF WRECK. A SINGLE MAST STANDING.

And this one? Undoubtedly a fishing schooner bound in from the fishing ground for market. Stripped by beach combers. Possibly one block on the foremast remains, as is evident by the exertions of two men still at work

SLIDE 28 BOW OF WRECK

Very little is left of this powerfully-built coal barge, which parted its hawser when in tow. Yes, the tug returned and rescued the crew. The Captain and Mate refused to abandon ship. Finally they entrusted their lives to a small dory. It was instantly capsized in the tumultuous seas. Their bodies were never found.

SLIDE 29 "BALD-HEADED" FISHERMAN IN THE SURF

A Gloucester fisherman being battered by the sea. Not on the outer bar but right on the beach! The crew were easily saved. Unless it moderates within the next twenty-four hours, the heavy sea will make short work of her.

SLIDE 30 A TWO TOPMAST SCHOONER IN THE SURF

A two topmast freighter from the granite quarries of Maine, loaded with paving stones for the streets of New York. Evidently she hit the beach with "everything on her." With shoal ground outside of her, she's doomed.

SLIDE 31 GROUP OF MEN ON BOW OF STEAMER

Summer people are interested in this powerfully-built English ship which has defied the strength of the breaking seas of Cape Cod for more than twenty years. Well above the low water mark, here she will rest for years to come.

SLIDE 32 A ~~XXXX~~ TWO-MASTED SCHOONER IN THE SURF

A fisherman bound to market in Boston. Right on the beach! In another twenty-four hours there will be nothing left of her. There is no possible chance of ever getting her off.

SLIDE 33 A SCHOONER ASHORE UNDER TWO JIBS AND FORESAIL

What we called "A bald-headed" coaster from the Prince Edward Islands, loaded with potatoes for New York. She's right in the surf, near the Peake Hill Life Saving Station. The crew didn't even stop to take down her sails knowing full well that within a few hours she would be a total wreck.

SLIDE 34 A TWO-MASTED SCHOONER IN THE SURF

A lime schooner from Rockland, Maine, bound for New York. Apparently, her back is broken, which means leakage, which means fire within a few hours - the inevitable result of a wreck loaded with lime.

SLIDE 35 A TWO MASTED SCHOONER IN THE SURF

Another fishing schooner bound for Boston, and attempting to make Provincetown Harbor for shelter from a "Northeaster," out the Cape too closely and found the beach not far from the Herring Cove. You may see Race Point in the distance. If it is not too rough during the night, she will come off in the morning on the high water.

SLIDE 36 THREE MEN IN WHITE STANDING AT DOORS OF STATION

The Life Saving Stations were just building when I was a small boy. Peaked Hill was well-known as one of the most dangerous places on the entire eastern seaboard. Due to the outlying bars, all traffic gave this notorious place a wide "berth".

SLIDE 37 A GROUP OF MEN IN WHITE STANDING AT DOOR OF STATION.

Race Point was about as bad, due to strong tides running in and out of Massachusetts Bay. It was a corner, so to speak, which must be turned to get into Provincetown Harbor. Just beyond is Race Point Light, a very valuable aid to mariners.

SLIDE 38 CAPTAIN SAM FISHER

As boys tramping over the dunes on a Saturday afternoon, naturally we wanted to see and talk with one of our heroes, the Captain of the Race Point Life Saving Station, and probably made so because of heroic struggle for life in attempting a rescue of a stranded stone sloop, the TRUMBULL, aground on the dreaded Peaked Hill Bar. The life boat was capsized as it approached the stranded ship. Sam Fisher and Charles P. Kelley were the only ones to reach the shore, following an heroic struggle, encouraged by the beams of a lantern in the hands of Surfman John Cole of the station who had been left behind.

SLIDE 39 PEAKED HILL BAR LIFE SAVING STATION

This station was the first to be built, but a bit reluctantly by the United States Government for some unknown reason. Benjamin Franklin was the first to recognize the dangers inherent in the troubled waters of Cape Cod land through his efforts a strong light was established at Highland.

SLIDE 40 CAPTAIN "WALL" COOK

And how we worshipped "Wall" Cook, a hero to every small boy in town, the Captain of the dangerous Peaked Hill Bar Station. We knew that he was thoroughly acquainted with the sea, that he knew just what tumbling waves would do, for he had followed the sea all his life.

SLIDE 41 WOOD END LIFE SAVING STATION

Wood End Life Saving Station was the last to be built, due to many grounders and ~~expensive~~ ^{dangerous} bar almost directly opposite the station. ~~Here, I spent many of my Spring vacations while teaching school~~ ^{Here, I spent many of my Spring vacations while teaching school} And here I often walked the beach at night with patrols, listening intently to their thrilling stories of rescue amid white-crested seas.

SLIDE 42 THE CREW OF WOOD END STATION

Captain "Ike" Fisher! What a man! And later on Captain George Bickers the designer of the lifeboats, now in use at nearly every station on the coast. Our family was very intimate through the years with the Bickers family. And here at the station were the two Portuguese, "Tooti" and "Gazeek". Also "Marebit" and "Parchie." Jot Small here, too, with whom I cruised the Labrador, Baffin Island - yes, and Greenland, where we spent four years together.

(Sentence Omitted) New

slide 44 CREW JUST BACK

Responding to the call for help from a ship in trouble. With sails in ribbons, leaking and unnavigable, crew in despair, and their helpless ship drifting toward the breakers of an unfriendly coast, how glad these sailors were to have help arrive!

SLIDE 44 LIFE BOAT NEAR SHIP IN DISTRESS

Responding to the call for help from a ship in trouble, with sails in ribbons, leaking and unnavigable, crew in despair, and their helpless ship drifting toward the breakers of an unfriendly coast, how glad these sailors were to have help arrive!

SLIDE 45 LIFE BOAT APPROACHING DERELICT

They had been out to a derelict, left and abandoned by an exhausted crew, now a menace to all passing ships. Such must be removed from the lands of all ships on their way from foreign ports bound for America.

SLIDE 46 WAVE WASHED DERELICT

Another derelict, awash and low in the water, and with no lights, and therefore invisible at night - and now a real danger to all shipping. If within reach of our lmen patrolling the coast, the Government depends upon them for destruction, which is generally done by the use of dynamite.

SLIDE 47 TWO MEN ON RAFT ONE WAVING

You are all acquainted with this classic. The only survivors of a s~~h~~ip which has gone to the bottom. For days without food or shelter, how happy they must be at last to sight help amidst the tumultuous waves of the North Atlantic.

SLIDE 48 A DERELICT

Another derelict-- a real danger to a ship going at full speed, endeavoring to be "on time," the ambition of the captain of every ocean liner running between here and Europe.

SLIDE 49 A DERELICT. STEAMER APPROACHING

And still another depending lupon our Government for removal - - largely the work called upon for the dangerous task assigned now to the so-called Coast Guard, the routing work of our so-called "cutters" and our airplanes.

SLIDE 50 S~~Z~~HIP LIFEBOAT APPROACHING

- Ships approaching our coast, often unmanageable, due to extremely cold wealher, frequently send out a call for help. the men at our life savi

SLIDE 50 SHIP LIFEBOAT APPROACHING

Ships approaching our coast, often unmanageable, due to extremely cold weather, frequently send out a call for help. The men at our life saving stations, now the Coast Guard, are ever ~~xx~~ on the alert for a call. I have known them to be gone for several days, helping an exhausted crew make harbor.

SLIDE 51 MEN IN WHITE STANDING BESIDE CART

Upon every day in the week these white-dressed men are active - the secret of happiness, as every sea captain knows. Today, dressed in their white uniforms, they are ready for a "boat drill" always exciting for boys whose fathers followed the sea.

SLIDE 52 LIFE BOAT ON WHEELS

We hoped to arrive at the station on time to witness the lap-streaked white lifeboat issue from the big doors of the boat-room. What a boat! Sharp at both ends, and unusual mode of construction, built after the pattern of our New England whaleboats. These men, many of whom had experienced a so-called "Nantucket Sleigh Ride," towed by an infuriated harpooned whale, knew exactly the type of boat needed for landing on the beach, going at express speed on the crest of a breaking sea.

SLIDE 53 LAUNCHING THE LIFE BOAT

With life-preservers strapped about their bodies, somewhat of a handicap but quite necessary in actual work, they stand ready, awaiting the word from the Captain to "push off," who from actual experience in launching a boat in "heavy weather" knows the exact time.

SLIDE 54 ROWING AWAY

This successfully accomplished, away they go! Yes, it is unusually calm -- a perfect day on the "Backside," a gentle ripple on the beach and smooth right to the very horizon. Take note of the cork fender, running the entire length of the lifeboat. Such is essential for buoyancy and has saved many an exhausted man from death.

SLIDE 55 THE "LIFE CART"

The exciting visit, however, was not on "boat drill day," but always of interest to every boy in Provincetown whom father followed the sea. How thrilled we were to witness these hardy men, heroes in the eyes of every boy in Provincetown, run the two-wheeled cart out of the big doors of the Station! Drill Day with the gun and the shooting of the nine pound projectile over the "yard-arm," a cross piece attached to a ^{timber} ~~timber~~ erected near the station. This exercise was planned to accustom the men employed at the station to an actual rescue of the crew of a stranded ship.

SLIDE 56 BREECHES BUOY APPARATUS SET UP

The Lyle gun was fired carrying a light line to a man stationed on the cross arm. He pulled a heavier line to the mast head. The breeches buoy was pulled off to the "wreck." One of the life savers then got into the breeches-buoy and was pulled ashore by the men on the beach.

SLIDE 57 BIG STEAMER ON THE BEACH

At times during thick fog, even a powerful steamship was stranded on our back beach. Such rarely remained. With plenty of power they were able to withstand the onslaughts of the sea until the ~~time~~ of the so-called spring tides, which occur regularly levery month at the ~~time~~ of the full moon.

SLIDE 58 BARK ON THE BEACH

This bark is evid ntly light, bound from one port to another for her cargo for a foreign port. She is pa iently awaiting a tug boat and an extremely high~~z~~ tide for her release.

SLIDE 59 FOUR-MASTER ON THE BEACH

Years ago large coal schooners were a common sight scudding down from Boston and P_ortland, Maine, for Norfolk, Newport Ne_gs and B_ltimore. Each carried on the return enormous loads of coal at \$2.00 a ton! Being light, she should be able, with the help of a strong tug, to be free on the ~~next~~ high water. They are a thing of the past, due to extensive amounts of oil u used today in our homes and also in Diesel engines .

SLIDE 60 HORSES ON THE BEACH

If all efforts fail to extricate a ship from the beach, these so-called wrecks are turned over to the insurance companies. They, in turn, call on the "wreckers," known to Provincetown people as the "Forty thieves." Whatever insulting terms may be employed in connection with the activities of such a body of men, all accustomed to the ways of the sea, they at times do the impossible.

SLIDE-61 FOUR MASTER AND WRECKING APPARATUS

~~xxHorses and wide-tired wagons appear and begin their strenuous~~
~~liberating~~ Horses and wide-tired wagons appear and begin their strenuous work of liberating an apparently doomed craft. If not "high and dry" as a sailor would say, lighters soon appear and begin their work of unloading, the first step in the extrication or freeing of a loaded ship from the clutches of a shifting sand bar.

SLIDE 62 WRECK IN TOWN

Such are always a curiosity to the sea-minded residents at Provincetown who are ever concerned over the cargo, naturally hoping to get their share of whatever it may be. There was a strong belief, existing in the minds of our early colonists, that a wrecked ship belonged to them. And such a belief still exists!

SLIDE 63 "A CAPE COD WRECK"

These wrecks, escaping from the beaches and bars of the much dreaded Peaked Hill, were always brought into the well protected harbor of Provincetown.

SLIDE 64 BARK IN TOWN

Being sea-minded, nothing was ever quite as interesting to a town boy, especially if the wreck happened to be a full-rigged ship! Such were rarely seen in our harbor. Schooners? Yes, the harbor and wharves were filled with so-called "Bankers," two-masted schooners, which sailed away in May for the Grand Banks and for "Quero" and the "Rocks" to return in early September, loaded "to the hatches."

SLIDE 65 THREE-MASTER ON THE BEACH

If a schooner, failing to be away on the high water, happened to remain on the beach within reach of the station, she was often used on "drill days" instead of the practice ground near the station. This three-masted schooner is ideally located for such work.

SLIDE 66 A THROWING STICK

Ahw ia ao ~~XXXX~~ near, in fact, that a "throwing stick" might be used instead of the small Lyle gun. Such is always carried to every wreck as a necessary part of the life-saving equipment.

SLIDE 67 A THREE MASTER MAN SUSPENDED IN BREECHES BUOY

A three-master. A man suspended in the breeches-buoy, the nine pound projectile over the spring-stay, which is one of the main stays connecting the masts, a good mark to shoot at. If a single-wasted wreck happens to be on the bar, it is hoped that the shot-line may fall across the deck and within reach of the imperiled and exhausted crew.

SLIDE 69 A LINE ~~KAXKE~~ MADE FAST TO TOPMAST

This small short line, once in the hands of the crew, is pulled from the shore. Fastened to the end of this is a stronger line, to which is fastened a small wooden board, on which is printed directions, instructing the wrecked crew to fasten the line to the head of ~~XXX~~ one of the masts.

SLIDE 70 THE BREECHES-BUOY

The stranded craft is now connected with the beach. The Life Saving crew then pull off a breeches-buoy on the stronger line. This is a life-preserver to which is attached a pair of strong canvas pants. One of the exhausted crew climbs in and the trip to the shore begins. This is at times a perilous ride. If the Captain of the ship refused to leave his wife behind, both are brought ashore together.

SLIDE 71 TWOIN BREECHES-BUOY

Thrilling tales are told of a rescue of this kind when both have been submerged again and again, if the wreck happens to be a long distance from the beach.

SLIDE 72 A LIFE-CAR

A familiar sight in my youthful days at the various stations was the life-car, used now and then when the safety of a large number was involved. Such, when loaded with six and even seven persons, was never popular, due to its excessive weight.

SLIDE 73 BERT BANGS

It was my privilege now and then during my vacations while teaching to spend days and even weeks at the Life Saving Stations. What a thrill to patrol the beach with these heroes of the storm and listen to their "yarns" of many years of service!

SLIDE 74 COSTON LIGHT

They always carried their "coston light," a very necessary part of the equipment of each man leaving the station. If a ship were sighted too near the beach and in danger of "grounding," the light was used to warn it ~~for~~ of its position.

SLIDE 75 HALFWAY HOUSE

About halfway between the various stations were located the so-called "Halfway Houses," the meeting place of the two surfmen from the adjoining stations. Furnished with plenty of wood, warm and snug following a long hard tramp, to arrive at such was indeed a pleasure. That is if one could enter, for drifting sands on blustery nights were known to practically bury these small buildings.

SLIDE 76 GROUP AT HALFWAY HOUSE

Entrance is at times gained only by crawling through a small opening just above the door. Yes, sand under the influence of a hard wind, drifts like drifting snow. And much more uncomfortable for it at times cuts the face until it bleeds.

SLIDE 77 COLLEGE GIRL WITH HEAD AND SHOULDERS OUT OF DOOR

The Dunes are of such interest to students of Geology that Professors of different colleges often bring their students to study this phenomenon. I know of nothing throughout America which can be compared to what were, undoubtedly, the "wonder sands" of the Vikings, as they cruised along our back shores.

SLIDE 78 MEN PULLING BOAT ALONG SHORE

If the surfman on patrol happens to descry a ship in peril on one of the multitude of bars fringing the shore of the Cape, he at once notifies the man on watch in the tower of the station. Thereupon there is immediate action, despite low temperatures, howling winds and drift.

SLIDE 79 MEN PULLING BOAT ALONG SHORE

Off these hardy men go along the shore to a point opposite the stranded wreck, pulling the lifeboat on wheels through the soft sand, at times breasting flying snow, rain, wind, and drift.

SLIDE 80 MEN LAUNCHING THE LIFEBOAT

And then comes the launching, a difficult task on a dark night, for heavy seas cannot be seen. Sometimes huge bonfires are built on the beach to encourage those on the wreck who may be living. This is to inform the survivors that help is near.

SLIDE 81 LAUNCHING THE LIFEBOAT

It is almost unbelievable what these brave men, who patrol the sandy beaches of Cape Cod have done during the last century. Entire crews have been lost in the performance of their duty. Others have volunteered immediately. Men are never lacking for this type of work--service for their fellowmen.

SLIDE 82 ROWING OUT THROUGH THE SURF

Such work calls for unbounded courage, nerve, stamina, and absolute obedience to the man in charge, when once away from the surf breaking heavily on the beach, and from the undertow, a decided menace.

SLIDE 83 ROWING THROUGH HEAVY SEAS

Rowing through heavy seas and huge waves, curling up as they encounter shoal ground, the lifeboat goes on its way generally safely to the outer bar, to a schooner filled with water.

SLIDE 84 THREE MASTED SCHOONER AND LIFEBOAT

A three-masted schooner, doomed for complete destruction during the next twenty-four hours. She is already breaking up under the impact of heavy seas. Water, soft as velvet to the touch, but driven on by wind and in bulk, apparently eager and ever ready to destroy everything within reach

SLIDE 85 THE KATIE J. BARRETT JUST BEFORE HER FOREMAST FELL

And yet miracles may happen and have happened on the wave-washed sandy shores of Cape Cod. The once-beautiful KATIE J. BARRETT. I know her Captain well. I knew his brother who had charge of the deck the night she found bottom. Every effort was made to save her from destruction. Her masts fell one by one. She was driven high on the beach. She lay there for a year and ^{Thousands} more, a complete wreck. ~~Thousands~~ of summer tourists paid their last respects.

SLIDE 86 THE KATIE J. BARRETT ON THE BEACH.

Finally her foremast fell and she lay there a hulk, washed by waves. To think that she might sail again around Cape Cod was beyond belief.

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SLIDE 87 THE KATIE J. BARRETT WITH NO MASTS

She was a curiosity to the summer people, many of whom had the opportunity of going on board one of our largest and best coal schooners in the world!

SLIDE 88 THE KATIE J. BARRETT AWASH

Yes, "at the mercy of the sea" which swept her decks and played and gambolled about her hull. And yet I saw her anchored in Portland Harbor two years later - a beautiful thing! And on her stern, proudly displayed her new name, the STAR OF THE SEA.

SLIDE 89 THE TWO BARGES ASHORE AT MONOMOY

On March 17, 1902, two barges, the WADENA and FITZPATRICK ~~lay~~ ~~stranded~~ stranded on the shoals off Monomoy. These two wrecks resulted in the loss of five men, working on the barge WADENA and the entire crew of the Monomoy Life Saving Station with the exception of Captain Eldridge, who was saved by the heroic efforts of Captain Elmer Mayo, the man standing at his left.

SLIDE 90 CAPTAIN ELDRIDGE AND ELMER MAYO

This tragedy was comparable to that which occurred ~~in~~ at the Peaked Hill Life Saving Station when I was a small boy -- all lost with the exception of one man. I well remember the "jigger" carrying their dead bodies past our home.

SLIDE 91 THE HIGH BLUFFS AT HIGHLAND

For many years from the lighthouse at Highland, one could see the iron prow of a once-proud ship ~~pro~~ projecting above the white-crested waves, that of the British ship JASON, wrecked at 7:15 on that terrible night of December 5, 1893. All stations from Monomoy to Highland knew perfectly well that she could never weather the so-called "Clay Pounds," on which the light, known as "Highland" stands. And if by chance she succeeded in doing this, the dreaded Peaked Hill Bars awaited her destruction.

SLIDE 92 A FULL-RIGGED SHIP AT SEA

At times ~~is~~ smooth as glass," an old sailor's expression. One could "round" Highland easily in a canvas canoe. Yes, that is the way of the sea today glistening in the warm sunlight, and tomorrow tumbling waves and a howling blizzard.

SLIDE X 93 A SHIP ROUNDING HIGHLAND LIGHT

This is labelled "A close call off Highland Light, Cape Cod." Through the centuries many a deeply-laden ship has failed to get by. Result: complete destruction and loss of all on board. And that is what happened to the PERUVIAN and to the full-rigged ship JASON.

SLIDE 94 FULL-RIGGED SHIP STRUCK HEAVILY ON THE BAR

This ship struck on the bar. The men climbed into the rigging of the Main Mast. Down it fell with a crash, killing all with the exception of an eighteen year old boy. He found himself in the raging sea and in contact with a black floating object -- a bale of jute, a part of her cargo. He clutched it for safety. This carried him rapidly into the breakers along shore, from which he was pulled to safety by the crew of the Life Saving Station -- the only one saved from a total of 35 men.

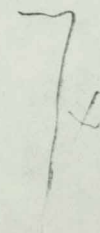
The ship, broken completely in half, remained here for years, a relic of the tragedy of the sea.

Let us pay honor to these gallant men who patrolled our shores that others might live, who with bent bodies and half-closed eyes struggled against furious winds and cutting sand, not for a mere pittance, but because they loved their work. And I ask you -- what greater or more noble work can there be than this -- the saving of human lives.

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THE LIFE SAVING SERVICE ON CAPE COD
(Talk and slides by Admiral Donald B. MacMillan)

1. Map of Cape Cod ✓
2. Surf on the Backside of the Cape. ✓
3. Surf on the Backside. ✓
4. Provincetown Harbor Full of Ice.
5. Provincetown. ✓
6. Houses and White Dory. ✓
7. Wheel Tracks over the Dunes.
8. A Portuguese Boy. ✓
9. Two Portuguese Boys. ✓
10. A Fish Weir.
11. Man in Dory (A Painting by Winslow Homer)
12. Man at Wheel of Fishing Schooner.
13. The "Watch" Calling
- 13.A. "Dressing" Cod and Haddock.
14. Fish on Flakes.
15. Attacking a Whale.
16. The Mortal Blow.
17. A Dead Whale on the Beach.
18. Whales on Beach at Brewster, Cape Cod.
19. Dead Trees on the Dunes.
20. Snake Tracks on the Dunes. ✓
21. Surf on the Backside.
22. Surf and a Sail.
23. House of Refuge.
- 23.A. Abandoned Hulks.
24. A Brig at the Water's Edge.
25. A Wreck-side Gone.
26. Three men and ribs of Wreck.
27. Remains of Wreck. A Single Mast Standing.
28. Bow of Wreck.

29. "Bald'Headed" Fisherman in the Surf.
 30. A Two-Topmast Schooner in the Surf.
 31. Group of Men on Bow of Steamer.
 32. A Two'Master Schooner in the Surf.
 33. A Schooner Ashore Under Two Jibs and Foresail.
 34. A Two'Masted Schooner in the Surf.
 35. A Two-Master Schooner in the Surf.
 36. Three Men in White Standing at Doors of Station.
 37. A Group of Men in White Standing at Door of Station.
 38. Captain Sam Fisher.
 39. Peaked Hill Bar Life Saving Station.
 40. Captain "Well" Cook.
 41. Wood End Life Saving Station.
 42. The Crew of Wood End Station.
 43. Crew Just Back.
 44. Life Boat Near Ship in Distress.
 45. Life Boat Approaching Derelict.
 46. Wave-Washed Derelict.
 47. Tow Men on Raft. One Waving.
 48. A Derelict.
 49. A Derelict. Steamer Approaching.
 50. Ship. Lifeboat Approaching.
 51. Men in White Standing Beside Cart.
 52. Life Boat on Wheels.
 53. Launching the Life Boat.
 54. Rowing Away.
 55. The "Life Cart."
 56. Breeches Buoy Appartus Set up.
 57. Big Steamer on the Beach.
 58. Bark on the Beach.
 59. Four-Master on the Beach.
 60. Horses on the Beach.
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61. Four-Master and Wrecking Appartus.
62. Wreck in Town.
63. "A Cape Cod Wreck"
64. Bark in Town.
65. Three-Master on the Beach.
66. A Throwing Stick.
67. A 19'lb. Shot.
68. A Three-Master Man Suspended in Breeches Buoy.
69. A Line Made Fast to Topmast.
70. The Breeches Buoy.
71. Two in Breeches Buoy.
72. A Life-Car.
73. Bert Bangs.
74. Coston Light.
75. ZHalfway House.
76. Group Gathered at Halfway House.
77. College Girl with Head and Shoulders out of Door.
78. Men Pulling Boat Along Shore.
79. Men Pulling Boat Along Shore.
80. Men Launching the Lifeboat.
81. Launching the Lifeboat.
82. Rowing out through the Surf.
83. Rowing Through Heavy Seas.
84. Three Master Schooner and Lifeboat.
85. The KATIE J. BARRETT Just before her Foremast Fell.
86. THE KATIE J. BARRETT on the Beach.
87. The KATIE J. BARRETT ~~xxxxxxx~~ with no Masts.
88. The KATIE J. BARRETT awash.
89. The Two Barges Ashore at Monomoy.
90. Captain Eldridge and Elmer Mayo.
91. The High Bluffs at Highland Light.
92. A Full-Rigged Ship at Sea.
93. A Ship Rounding Highland Light.
94. Full-Rigged Ship Struck Heavily on the Bar.