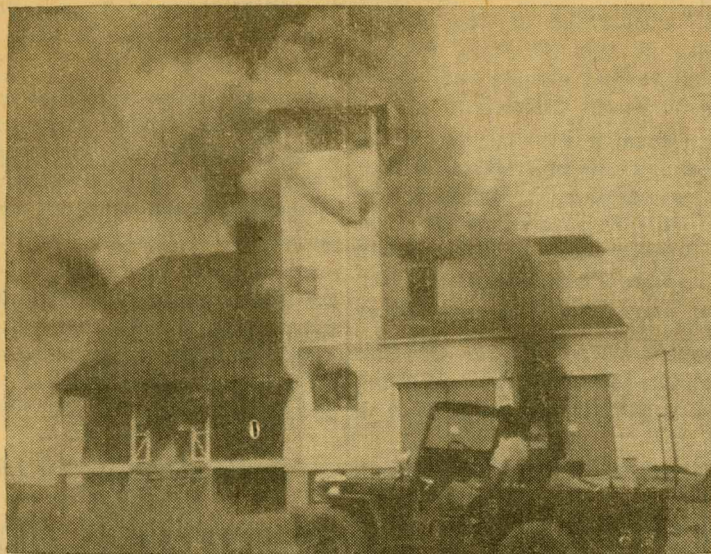


- August 24, 1961 -

Wood End Station Becomes Only Another Memory



Fire Chief Wilbur Cook watches as flames consume the old Wood End Coast Guard Station.

The old Wood End Coast Guard Station became another memory in local history last Thursday when, under contract from the Government to dispose of the building, contractor James M. Silva and his crew set fire to the station and destroyed it. The smoke and flames were clearly visible for miles around and innumerable anxious telephone inquiries had to be answered during the course of the afternoon.

It has been more than a year since the station has been manned and then only by a skeleton crew in charge of the light. It was built about 1896 and it was there to weather the Portland gale in 1898 and the first keeper was Captain Isaac Fisher with his crew of, normally, eleven men. Most noted among the stalwart men in charge was the late Captain George Bickers, who was placed in charge in 1901 and remained there for 21 years until his retirement.

Captain Bicker's son, Arthur Bickers, curator of the Historical Museum, recalls vividly incidents in the history of the station and activities of the men there. The solidly constructed building, centrally heated, contained living and bedroom quarters for the keeper, a large kitchen, and a mess hall on the main floor with dormitory quarters on the second floor. Part of the building housed life-saving apparatus including a large boat and two beach boats. There was also a large storeroom for all manner of supplies. Mr. Bickers recalls how all the floors in the station were washed every week and undoubtedly there are a number of retired Coast Guardsmen in town who well remember that stint and those polished floors that went up in flames Thursday. There was always painting to be done, Mr. Bickers recalls, and every day there were practice drills of one kind or another. In the apparatus quarters was the steel boat that was launched and pulled out to a wreck before the breeches buoy was invented. Mr. Bickers also recalls how a vessel was wrecked during the Portland storm, loaded with lime, its cargo thrown around the area by the savage winds and the crew members who had sought safety in the rigging froze to death there. The Wood End men looked on helplessly as the submarine S-4 and crew died slowly in the nearby sea.

Captain Bickers was succeeded by Captain Albert Burch and for a time the station was in command of Captain Manuel Gracie.

Before and during the Civil War there was a settlement of some size on Long Point with some 60 homes and with its own school. The sole industry was the processing of whale oil and whale products. When "coal oil" was found in quantities in Titusville, Pa., in 1873 the doom of the settlement was sounded and practically all

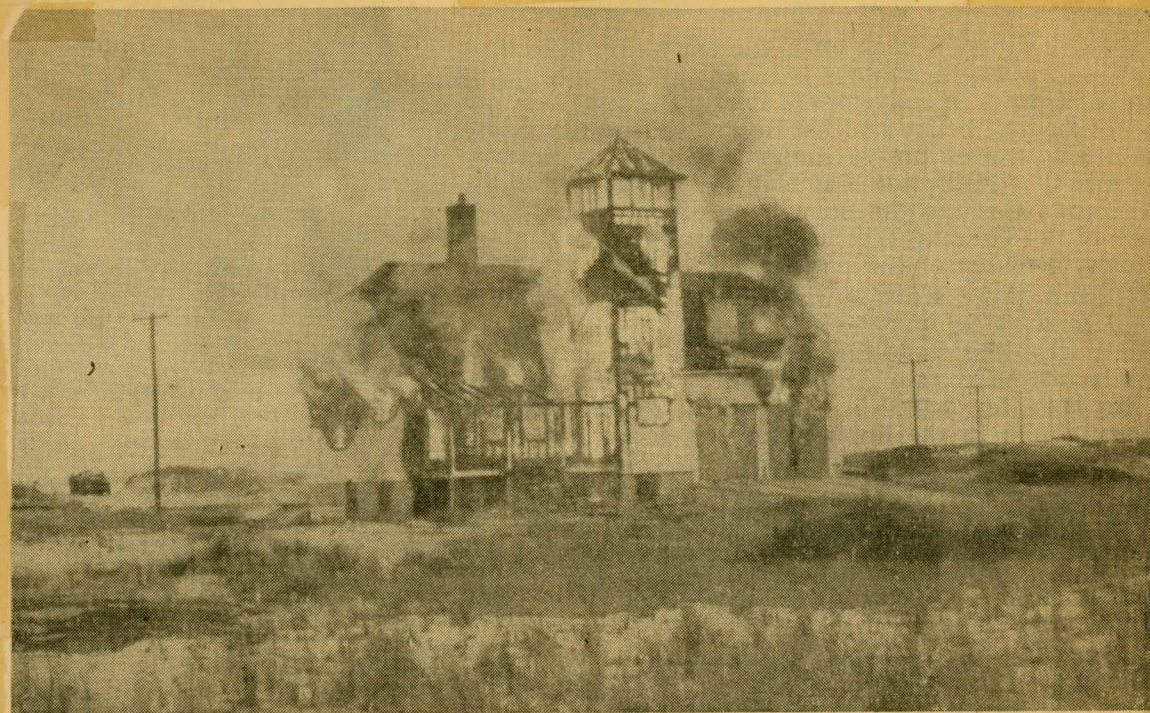


Photo Courtesy Bert Perry

A wave of questioning amazement and deep regret passed through this Cape End town Thursday afternoon as the torch was deliberately put to the old Wood End Coast Guard Station on Long Point, removing the last—except for the light—of what was once a small settlement.

of the buildings of the settlement including the school, were floated on barges across the bay to take up more permanent abode in Provincetown.