

Lifesaving Stations

Langdon Parsons has a lot to say about saving lives along the rocky shore of Rye. Before 1873, when the first station was built at North Jenness Beach, saving lives from shipwrecks and other mishaps was the job of whoever was on shore. The first station was built in New Hampshire and was staffed by a captain and six-to-eight men.

In 1890, a more solid structure was built nearby, with gingerbread adornment and can be seen today as a private home on the left at the end of the beach access road closest to the Cable House. In that same year, the Wallis Sands station, located about mid-beach, was built and by that time, the Jaffrey's Point station in New Castle and the Hampton station had been built. A substation was added at Odiorne to protect mariners from that rocky point. For 10 months a year, the men had to patrol the beach during storms so that the entire coastline between the four stations was covered. Parsons is outraged that these men are laid off for two months during the summer to save the government money:

“...ungenerous to the men, and a piece of cheese-paring parsimony unworthy of a great and wealthy nation.”

~History of the Town of Rye, New Hampshire; Langdon Brown Parsons

Lifesaving was rigorous and dangerous work. It required a lot of training – learning to fire the gun that sent the lifeline to ships in distress and practicing with the lifeboat in the surf. The great value of these men can be seen during the wreck of the schooner Lizzie Carr off Stinky Creek in 1905. The Wallis Sands station sent their lifeboat out to the sinking ship in a gale and rescued all aboard except for one who tried to swim ashore and was drowned. The remains of the schooner can be seen at the Seacoast Science Center today.