

U.S. Coast Guard Station
HUMBOLDT BAY



SAMOA, CALIFORNIA

For more than two hundred years European adventurers explored the California coast searching for suitable harbors and anchorages. A low bluff on the east shore of the bay obscured the entrance channel and knowledge of the bay waited until 1806 when the entrance was located by a land party of seal hunters from the fur trader O'CAIN which was then anchored in Trinidad Harbor.

The area remained unsettled until the California gold strike in 1848. In the spring of 1850, many ships loaded with fortune seekers sailed for the still unnamed bay. In April of that year, the LAURA VIRGINIA commanded by Captain Douglas Ottinger explored the bay and reported on its abundant animal and mineral riches. Captain Ottinger declined to give the bay his name, instead choosing to honor Baron Von Humboldt, an earlier explorer of the Pacific Northwest.

To support the blossoming gold and timber industries the towns of Eureka and Union (later renamed Arcata) were established on the bay. On the evening of 20 December 1856 the Humboldt Bay Entrance Light shown for the first time. Despite this navigational aid twenty three significant shipwrecks occurred on the entrance bar between 1858 and 1878 when a Lifesaving Station was established on the bay. The first keeper, Captain Starr, and six volunteer surfmen manned the station. Their rescue techniques, primitive by today's standards consisted of hauling a boat and lifesaving equipment on carts to a point near the shipwreck and firing lines to the distressed vessel with a small cannon. In 1892 a new lighthouse was constructed on Table Bluff and the old light became the lookout tower for the lifesaving station. The ruins of the Humboldt Entrance Light, one of the the original seven lighthouses on the California coast, can still be seen near the radio beacon antenna west of the station.

The building you are now standing in was constructed in 1936 at a cost of \$78,000. With an additional \$40,000 of life

saving equipment, it began operation in 1937 and was described as the finest Coast Guard Station in the United States. It was one of the last stations built in the traditional style with a marine railway and boat room. When not in use the lifeboats were hauled out on the railway and stored inside the house. The structure and associated railway were designed to accommodate three 36 foot motor lifeboats.

Early in the morning of December 22, 1941 the SS EMIDIO was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese submarine near Blunt's Reef Light Ship. Soon after the sinking, Station Humboldt Bay became the headquarters of Company C, Twelfth Regiment, U. S. Coast Guard Beach Patrol. On foot and later on horseback, men assigned to the patrol hiked along the lonely beaches between Cape Mendocino and Little River alert to signs of further enemy action.

During the rehabilitation project in 1978 significant changes were made to the interior of Station Humboldt Bay. The boat room on the first floor was divided into the offices, hallways and spaces you see today. Listed on the national historic register; the house and railway are protected from modification; changes to the exterior appearance (such as the addition of the front porch in 1978) can be made only after extensive review.

Motor lifeboat 36515 was assigned to Station Humboldt Bay from the late 1950's to the early 1980's. In 1982 it was decommissioned and donated to the Humboldt Bay Maritime Museum. In 1994 it was returned to the station for display on the marine railway as a monument to the heroes of the Coast Guard - yesterday and today.

With a crew of twenty six active duty and six reserve Coast Guard men and women, Station Humboldt Bay operates two 44 foot motor lifeboats, one 30 foot surf rescue boat and a six meter rigid hull inflatable boat. Welcome aboard. Enjoy your visit.

