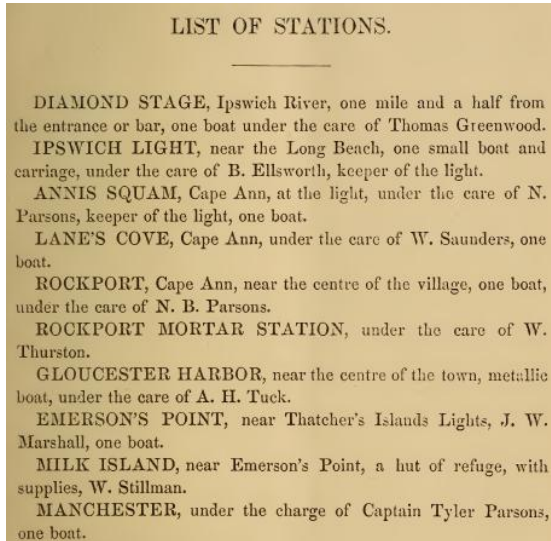


Meet Flotilla 46 – Cape Ann, Massachusetts on its 50th Anniversary

By John W. Keyes, FC Flotilla 46

The spirit of volunteerism is not new to Cape Ann. The *Humane Society of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* was organized in 1786 and not long after, “Huts of Refuge” and volunteer-crewed rescue boats were pre-positioned along the Massachusetts coastline. By 1871, when the U.S. Life-Saving Service (USLSS) was created, the Humane Society was responsible for 78 lifeboats and 92 huts, boathouses, and other structures. These two organizations operated in tandem, and in friendly rivalry, until the 1930s.



An excerpt from the Human Society of Massachusetts Annual Report of 1864. (Courtesy of National Archives.)

In 1967, Flotilla 46's plank-owning original Flotilla Commander, Herbert E. Brack, would distinguish himself and Flotilla 46 in the following action:

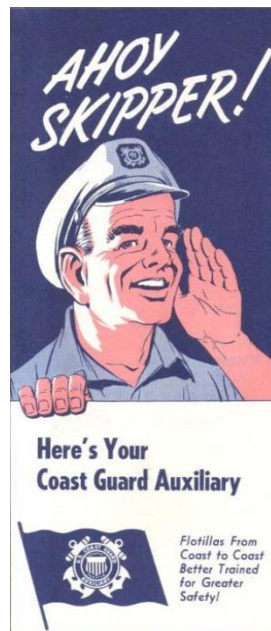
“On September 17, 1967, two small boats foundered in the mouth of the Ipswich River in Massachusetts. Brack, who was fishing on board his boat, the *Grand Slam*, answered the distress call and, despite swells and 10-foot breakers, rescued three survivors.”



For his courage, Mr. Brack would be awarded the Auxiliary Plaque of Merit (“A” Award), an honor bestowed by the Commandant or District Commander “in recognition of extreme skill in performing an assist or rescue that involves risk to the Auxiliarist's life.”

In 1915, the USLSS and the Revenue Cutter Service were merged to form the U.S. Coast Guard and the need for volunteer rescuers waned – until 1939 when Congress established the all-volunteer U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. And finally, July 1963 would mark the return of volunteer lifesavers to Cape Ann with the activation of USCG Auxiliary Flotilla 46, 50 years ago.

The charter members of Flotilla 46 numbered just thirteen men, but they had at their disposal no less than eleven vessels as Operational Facilities. The small crew included experienced seamen and World War II veterans from the United States Army, Navy, and Coast Guard active duty. By 1965, the flotilla had no less than nine certified “Courtesy Motorboat Examiners” or “CMEs”; what we would call Vessel Examiners today.



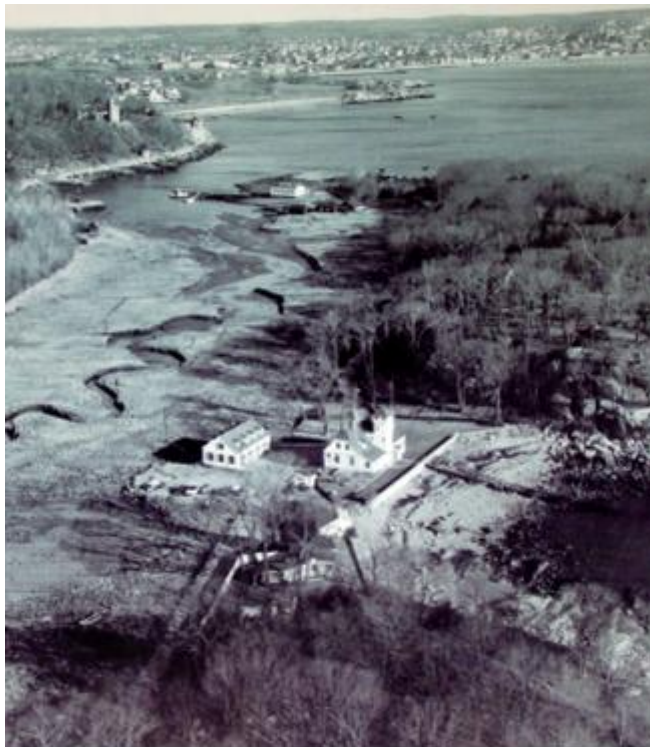
A Humane Society boat house was built adjacent to the Annisquam Lighthouse in the early 1800's. (Copy of a postcard in the author's collection, circa 1906.)

An Auxiliary prospective member information pamphlet from 1964. (From the author's collection.)

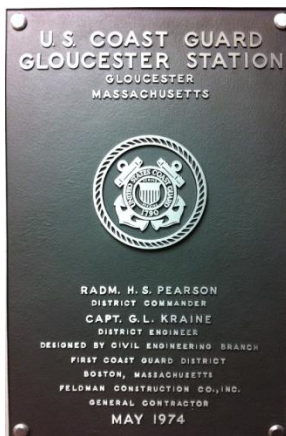
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The Flotilla's original home was aboard Coast Guard Station #23, on Dolliver's Neck, along the west side of Gloucester Harbor; but larger boats and shifting sands prompted the station to move to its current Harbor Loop location in 1974 - and the Flotilla moved with it. By the mid-1980s the Flotilla's membership had doubled to around 30 members. More members mean more missions, and in 1984 Flotilla 46's high operational tempo resulted in 1,113 logged operational hours. But this was not unusual; the Flotilla was recognized several times in the 1980s for its underway activities. In 1986, for example, the Flotilla had completed 77 Operational Support Missions, assisted 104 persons, and accounted for \$574,000 worth of property saved or assisted – all by the end of August. At the time, the Flotilla was maintaining 10 qualified Boat crew Members and two Coxswains.



U.S. Coast Guard Station #23, Dolliver's Neck, Gloucester MA, circa 1960. (Courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard History Photo Archives.)



Commissioning Plaque, U.S. Coast Guard Station Gloucester, 1974. (Photo by the author.)

By the end of the 1980s, the number of Flotilla Operational Facilities had dwindled to just five. However, during the decade, Flotilla 46 was recognized as the *Outstanding Flotilla of District 1 (NR)* in both 1984 and 1989. In 1990, two Flotilla members who had joined the Coast Guard Reserves were called to active duty for the first Gulf War. One would be promoted to Warrant Officer and one would again return to active duty after the World Trade Center attacks.

In the 1990's Congress greatly increased the responsibilities of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. The broader mission required additional training, familiarization with Federal Requirements like the Incident Command System, and the obligation to maintain certifications within various qualifications. The average Auxiliary member had to be prepared to take on any mission the Commandant might see fit to assign. Flotilla 46 would again rise to the challenge, being recognized again as *Outstanding Flotilla of First District (NR)* in 1991. But the challenges didn't end there. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, Flotilla 46 found itself a member of the Department of Homeland Security and promoting the America's Waterway Watch Program.

As the 2006 boating season came to an end, Flotilla 46 again found its underway operational tempo increasing, along with its missions in Public Education, Public Affairs, Vessel Safety Checks, and the Marine Dealer

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Visitation Program. Membership had fallen to less than twenty and just one quarter of that membership was Boat Crew qualified. Flotilla 46, and the other Flotillas in Division 4, would have to get creative. In the age-old Coast Guard tradition of doing more with less, the Flotillas combined boat crews and shared Operational Facilities across the Division. And each year, somehow, they meet their obligations and support the missions assigned to their Area of Responsibility.

In fifty years Flotilla 46 has changed in so many ways, but in other ways it hasn't changed at all. Flotilla 46 still serves its boating community with a keen sense of duty. Its members are still committed today, as they were 50 years ago, to making our waterways and coastlines safer for those who use and enjoy them. Today, as in 1963, Flotilla 46 is first and foremost *Semper Paratus!*



USCG Station Gloucester today. (Photo by the author.)



Safety Patrols supporting the Bicentennial of the War of 1812. (Photo by the author.)



FSO-MS Michael Bergmann labels storm drains during his "Drains to the Harbor" Environmental Protection Mission. (Photo by Gardner Winchester II, VFC.)



FC John Keyes and IPFC Heather Johnson participate in Coastsweep 2012. (Photo by Ben Johnson.)