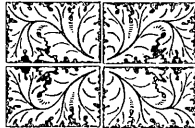


The U. S. LIFE SAVING SERVICE,

by WILLIAM A. NEWELL, A.M., M.D., L.L.D.,

*ORIGINATOR AND
FOUNDER IN THE
30th CONGRESS, ON
3d of JANUARY, 1848.*

*Published in The Freehold Transcript, Freehold, New Jersey,
March 29th, 1901.*



From The Freehold Transcript of March 29, 1901.

We publish this week an account by ex-Governor William A. Newell of the establishment of the life saving service now so efficient in saving lives and property upon ocean, lake and river within the bounds of the United States, and especially upon our own New Jersey coast. This great work owes its inception to Governor Newell. There has been more than one effort to rob him of the honor and glory of it, but he has established his claim beyond a peradventure. The whole of the long article was written by the governor who is now in active practice of his profession at Allentown in this county.

The article as it appeared in *The Transcript* follows:

"Various objections were made to my motion, the strongest of which was that the scheme was impracticable.

I laid the matter before a great many senators and members, speaking to them in person. President John Quincy Adams occupied a seat just behind mine, and after the reading of the resolution by the clerk, leaned forward and said to me: "I would like to see that resolution."

I sent for it, and handed it to him. He read it over carefully, and, handing it to me, said with a smile: "It is good. I hope it will prevail."

Abraham Lincoln also read it, and said: "Newell, that is a good measure. I will help you. I am something of a life-saver myself, for I invented a scow that righted itself on the Mississippi sandbars!"

I also had the earnest support and the kind wishes of ex-Presidents James K. Polk, Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Andrew Johnson, Rutherford B. Hayes, U. S. Grant and James A. Garfield; also of Salmon P. Chase, James G. Blaine, Roscoe Conkling, Joshua R. Giddings, Zachariah Chandler, Oliver P. Morton, Sam Houston, John Bell, Simon Cameron, Benjamin Wade, Robert J. Walker, Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, Stephen A. Douglas, Thomas H. Benton, Lewis Cass, Henry S. Foote, Samuel J. Randall, Sumner Stevens, Jeff Davis and other noted statesmen."

Mr. C. F. Fisk, the Allentown correspondent of *THE TRANSCRIPT*, recently showed the above extract from the Philadelphia Press to ex-Governor Newell. The governor very kindly consented to explain more in detail the

incident in his public career which has made him famous the world over, and a few days later submitted the following:

"It is very kind in the Press to reproduce even so much of my article, published in the March number of Success, for newspaper space is valuable, but the extract only gives the names of the statesmen who listened patiently to my plan, and gave it their valued support, but it does not furnish to the public a full understanding of my system or the arguments presented to secure its adoption by the government.

On the third day of January 1848, the state of New Jersey being called for resolutions, in the United States House of Representatives, in my place, as a member, I offered the following Resolutions of Inquiry, which passed unanimously:

"Resolved, That the committee on commerce be instructed to inquire whether any plan can be devised whereby the dangerous navigation along the coast of New Jersey, between Sandy Hook and Little Egg Harbor, may be furnished with additional safeguards to life and property, and that they report by bill or otherwise."

The committee ignored the resolution entirely and made no report whatever, although Washington Hunt of New York, and Jos. H. Grinnell, and W. R. King of Massachusetts, maritime and commercial states, were chairman, and members, considering my scheme futile and impossible of practical application. I could not persuade any other committee, with power to recommend appropriations, to favor me with an opportunity, which they claimed would be a discourtesy to the commerce committee. I then made personal efforts with senators and members, during the longest session on record, intending to offer an amendment to some bill as opportunity might offer. Such a chance came when the light house bill from the senate came, in due course, to the house of representatives, so, on the 9th day of August, 1848, I offered the following amendment thereto, (Congressional

J 910.45

11457

VAULT

Globe, 30th Congress, Vol. 19, page 1089.)

"August 9th. The light house bill from the senate being under consideration before the house, Mr. Newell from New Jersey, offered the following amendment: 'For providing surf boats, life boats, rockets, carronades, and other necessary apparatus for the better preservation of life and property from shipwreck along the coast of New Jersey, between Sandy Hook and Little Egg Harbor, ten thousand dollars; to be expended under the supervision of such officer of the treasury as may be designated by the secretary of the treasury for that purpose.'

The question being taken, the amendment was unanimously adopted. The governor continued: "Thus, and thus only—by my solitary efforts, was the present system originated, founded and established, a system without counterpart, parallel or substitute on other shores of the world, which has been the means of rescuing over two hundred thousand (200,000) human lives, and millions of imports—rescued property, which has given to the treasury millions of dollars in tariff duties, all without patent, or price, or profit to the originator and founder.

"On the 3rd day of August, 1848, I made an elaborate speech (see Congressional Globe and appendix of that date) giving all the statistics of wrecks on our coast which I could gather, saying: 'The coast of New Jersey is more famous for shipwrecks, attended with loss of life than any other portion of our country, not excepting the Florida reefs, owing to a peculiar condition which I shall presently explain.'

"The New Jersey shore, as may be seen by running the eye upon the map lies in a direction by the compass, northeast and southwest, or nearly with these points, and vessels approaching our coast for the harbor of New York, are often carried towards these shores by the strong northeasterly winds which prevail in winter and which are frequently accompanied with thick weather, which is the especial dread of the mariner.

"Now the condition which makes the New Jersey coast especially dangerous is this, that for the greater part of its whole extent there lies a bar nearly parallel with the beach, at a distance from it, from three to eight hun-

dred yards. Upon this bar there is not more than two feet of water, so that a vessel driven by stress of weather must be inevitably stranded long before she gets near enough to the beach to enable those on board to take any measures for the preservation of life. Not even an ordinary ship's long boat can float over this bar. In most cases of shipwreck there are some fortunate escapes, and the chance for life is always increased as the distance from *terra firma* is lessened. But here the mariner sees land before him, with a perilous space between the shore and the bar beneath him, and without assistance from that shore he can never reach it, but must perish in sight of that land, which during his weary voyage he has longed for by day and dreamed of by night.

"This assistance the small appropriation asked for is designed to render. Although a ship's boat cannot cross the bar, a surf boat will do this, and will also live in a sea and come to land where a *keelboat* would be swamped. These surf boats then, it is proposed to provide at suitable stations along the shore, and where the approach to the coast is most dangerous. In addition to this it is proposed to furnish at each station, a carronade of sufficient calibre to throw a ball with a rope attached, over the vessel in distress, so that those on board may 'bend a hawser' to this rope and thus effect a communication with the land. Finally that there shall be deposited a certain number of rockets, so that in a dark night a signal may be made to apprise those on board the distressed vessel, in what direction they may look for aid. With these few simple appliances it is believed that the hazard to life will be greatly diminished.

"It is the bounden duty of the government, specially to protect the lives of such of its citizens as are engaged in those perilous pursuits from which are immediately derived the revenues of the country. This proposition has been tacitly received, and acted upon in the erection of lighthouses, and breakwaters and in anchoring buoys to mark the channels of our harbors.

"But I desire to see it not negatively, but positively recognized. The lighthouse is but a mockery when it conveys a warning that

comes too late or marks a danger that cannot be averted. But give us some of those rockets, of which we had such a fine display on the memorable anniversary which has just passed, a few surf-boats, a small quantity of rope, a few carronades, which can never be put to better use, give us these means, and my constituents will bless you, the mariner and the merchant and the passenger will bless you, and He who orders all earthly events will smile upon efforts which under your auspices are hereafter made in the sacred cause of humanity."

Subsequently I offered amendments to extend my system all along the remaining coast of New Jersey and the entire Atlantic coast, and Gulf of Mexico, securing in all about fifty thousand dollars, remarking in my speech February 19, 1849: "A system which is the dictate of sound governmental policy and requires to be extended, for like purposes, to every part of our common country," a patriotic purpose now happily achieved for stations, nearly three hundred in number, are established upon our Oceans—Pacific and Atlantic—Gulf and Lake borders. In the same speech I said: "The appropriation made at the last session of Congress for the shore of the district which I have the honor to represent is now in process of application under the supervision of a gentleman, who certainly understands the nature of his task and, enters upon it with the ardor and spirit which characterizes his profession: I send to the Clerk's desk for reading, a letter addressed to myself dated October 18, 1848, which I have received from that gentleman, Captain Douglass Ottinger of the Revenue Marine service which states: * * * * We have erected eight stations within the limit of the law for the preservation of life and property from shipwreck on the coast of New Jersey, and design to have at each of them a substantial frame house to be furnished with galvanized surf-boats, ten separate air chambers, one hundred and sixty fathoms of hawser, three hundred and sixty fathoms of rope, six hundred yards of rocket line, rockets, etc. In addition to the life-boats, I propose to have a life car in each station which is designed to carry a line to the stranded vessel where the wind and sea are too heavy for the best constructed tow line.

"I have made some experiments in throwing a line from the shore to a vessel with a rocket, and threw it two hundred and fifty yards, with which we tested the practicability of sending a hawser from the beach to a boat or vessel.

"It is my intention as soon as the weather will permit to make some trials in throwing a line by means of a mortar and shot, and am of the opinion that, if successful, we shall place them at the several stations."

Captain Ottinger did not have much confidence in the success of ball and mortar as is manifested in the preceding extract, but I persisted in urging the experiments with gratifying success.

The letter further states: "I am much indebted to one of your constituents, Major Henry Wardell, for valuable information on the subject of my present duties, and, during my stay with him I had the satisfaction of hearing remarks from several intelligent persons throughout the neighborhood, who were gratified that the government was about to place under their control more effectual means to enable them to extend their usefulness in preserving life and property from shipwreck."

"This letter Mr. Speaker, furnishes information in detail of the plans to be pursued in carrying out the intention of congress as expressed at the last session. It only remains to be seen if it shall be extended so as to take in the rest of New Jersey and Long Island shores."

The first and the grandest success of the system was the rescue of the entire list, passengers and crew, two hundred and one persons—from the wreck of the Scottish barque Ayreshire, from Newry, England, on the night of the 12th of January, 1850, in the midst of a blinding snowstorm. Grandest, because it was the first effort, was performed entirely by volunteer wreckers and surfmen, without experience or practice, and because all endangered were saved, being safely landed on Squan Beach Woodlands, in sections of two days and nights.

A gold medal was awarded to John Maxen, Station No. 4, who in his life time enjoyed the notable distinction of having fired the first life line over a stranded vessel with ball and mortar, the new and untried device. The gold

medal was donated to him by the New York board of underwriters for his bravery and skill, being presented by Dr. Robert Laird of Manasquan, who happily, still lives and recounts with much satisfaction his active participation in this first achievement of the service in rescuing life and property from the perils of the sea, by an instrumentality hitherto unknown.

There was no general superintendent until about the year 1870, the business being supervised, as I remember, by the sixth auditor of the treasury. All wreckers served gratuitously. In 1860 President Lincoln made his first appointment personally, by making me superintendent of the service for the coast of New Jersey, a position which I held until elected to congress in 1864.

July 14, 1866, in my speech advocating the extension of the system, I said: "These appropriations were expended under the supervision of an experienced officer of the revenue service in erecting buildings called station houses at intervals originally about ten miles apart—and, as the appropriations were made, five or six miles—along the coast of New Jersey, beginning at Sandy Hook and extending to Cape May, and on the coast of Long Island which has 12 of these establishments. Each house is provided with a surf boat, a life car which is an elliptical vessel holding six passengers: who lie down when the hatch is fastened, and the car made impervious to water. At the ends of each car is attached a large iron ring, through which runs a cable extending from the vessel to the shore, on which the car plays through the surf, being pulled backward and forward by a rope attached to each end, by the crews and the wreckers alternately, communication being established by a ball thrown from a mortar to which is attached a line. A truck or broad wheeled wagon to carry the surf boat, life cars and other necessary appliances to the point of danger, blue lights, used to notify the wrecked of approaching aid, or to warn them off a dangerous point of shore, lanterns, axes, spades, speaking trumpets, lines, ropes, cables, life preservers, a stove, a full supply of wood cut up, and provisions, complete the furniture and contents of a station house." A pasteboard list of all of

these articles was conspicuously nailed on the walls of the station house.

This complete condition and equipment existed long years before the office of general superintendent was established by congress and with the exception of buoys it will be difficult to discover any improvement or material addition to the station house as equipped and managed 40 years ago. Certainly no greater success attends the operations now in saving life and property than were obtained in that remote period. It came into existence full fledged and capable of any wrecking duty.

I had the pleasure of witnessing an exhibition of manipulating the service, given by Captain Reynolds, at the Cape May station, last summer, which for beautiful and successful operation could not be surpassed, but which was not superior to a similar demonstration given at Long Branch in 1864 in honor of Mrs. Lincoln, her sister Miss Todd, and Robert Lincoln, who attended by invitation. The only unusual circumstance was the bursting of a carronade which served to give interest to the occasion, and to startle the guests and the large concourse of citizens present.

Considering that such generous and dangerous labor should be rewarded, in my speech of July 14, 1866—39th congress—I remarked: "It is especially desirable that the crews of the life boats who endanger their lives should be paid a regular salary and also be rewarded for any dangerous and successful duty in saving life and property. Such services have hitherto been rendered by those gallant men without pay or reward, and such injustice should no longer disgrace this government, and I trust that when the proposition is made to reward them, that consent will not be withheld. I desire to give notice that at the proper time I will make an effort to provide for them a suitable compensation. My constituents have ever been on the alert to save life and property from the dangers of shipwreck and ask no compensation for these acts of humanity, and seek no relief from its burdens, but they should not be expected to keep up an organization for that purpose, and be always ready to afford relief and receive no compensation for their services. For a century or more have these dwellers by the sea, in my district imperiled their lives to save the

lives of their fellow creatures from dangers of shipwreck, with no other reward, or hope of reward, than an approving conscience would afford. Such people are entitled to all the honors that the government can bestow. They deserve to be liberally compensated, to have their usefulness increased, and I believe that this body will not fail to give them suitable recognition."

I have in my possession a copy of the annual report of the general superintendent to the secretary of the treasury for 1876, by Hon. S. J. Kimball, bearing upon the fly leaf this autograph inscription: "To Hon. William A. Newell, the father and founder of the life saving service of the United States, with the regards of S. J. Kimball, General Superintendent L. S. S.," in which is recorded on page 41 "Initiation of the life saving service: As has been observed the government first gave its attention to the method of aiding stranded vessels, by the establishment of stations along the coast, furnished with the means of effecting communication between such vessels and the shore, and to the Hon. William A. Newell, then a member of the house of representatives from New Jersey, belongs the honor of first advocating the merits of his plan, in a speech in which he described the uses of the surf boat, mortar, rockets, etc., portraying vividly the horrible scenes of shipwreck upon the calamitous shores of his state, of which himself had been an eye witness, eloquently vindicating the dwellers of the coast from the aspersions of rapacity and heartlessness which had been inconsiderately heaped upon them, asservated their favor of his petition and pledged their gallant use of such means as the government might entrust to them. This appeal made August 3, 1848, was rewarded by an appropriation of \$10,000 for providing surf boats, rockets, carronades and other necessary apparatus for the better preservation of life and property from shipwreck along the coast of New Jersey, from Sandy Hook to Little Egg Harbor."

"The value of these appliances both in a humane and pecuniary sense was thus established, and considerations of duty and financial interest combined in urging upon the government the extension of their application

to other points of the coast. Consequently at the next session of congress in an act 'making appropriations for lighthouses, buoys, etc., approved Sept. 28, 1850, \$10,000 more was appropriated for life-boats and other means of rendering assistance to wrecked mariners and others on the coast of the United States; and in an act approved two days later a like sum for the same purpose," 'my amendments as stated.'

Such is the official testimony voluntarily given by Hon. S. J. Kimball, then and now general superintendent of the United States Life Saving Service, all confirmatory of the congressional history presented in this paper.

The credit of originating and founding the United States Life Saving Service belongs exclusively to the Second Congressional District of 1846, composed of the counties of Monmouth, (which then included Ocean county,) Burlington and Mercer. It was on the coast of that district that my attention was directed to the necessity of "additional means for the preservation of life and property from shipwreck" by witnessing the wreck of the Austrian brig, the Count Perasto, in June 1839, when thirteen sailors, the entire crew, were wrecked, being stranded upon the bar, on Long Beach, and their dead bodies scattered along the coast for miles. It was there that the first rescues were effected at Squan Beach, the bark Ayreshire as just detailed, and it was there that the first department of Station Houses were erected from Sandy Hook to Little Egg Harbor, which constituted the ocean frontage of that congressional district.

I am constrained to emphasize this statement by the widely published claim that the first station house was built at Cape May, was still standing, and to be exhibited as such, at the coming exposition at Buffalo.

My first appropriation was secured August 9th, 1848—see Congressional Globe,—at the first session of the 30th congress and was expended before the second was obtained at the second session of same congress—see Congressional Globe, second session, 30th congress, vol. XX page 693, March 3, 1849, by means of which the system was extended from Little Egg Harbor to Cape May, New Jersey.

U. S. LIFE SAVING SERVICE.

Tradition confirms this history in the person of a son of Major Henry Wardell:

LONG BRANCH, N. J., Feb. 4, 1901.

WM. A. NEWELL, ESQ.,

Dear Sir:—I received your letter and in reply can answer that the stations at Sandy Hook, at father's place, now Monmouth Beach, Corleis', at Deal, and at Wreck Pond, now Sea Girt, were one, two, three, and four, numbers beginning at Sandy Hook. They were all built in the same year and the one at father's was the first one that was equipped.

Yours respectfully,

Major EDWARD WARDELL.
Per. E.

The original Second congressional district did me great honors in my earliest manhood which I appreciated and recognized practically, as best I could, and I was happy to be able to establish an institution which was personally serviceable to many seafaring men, my constituents, who encountered in their calling, the tempests of the ocean and the dangers of the wreck; and I count myself especially fortunate to have represented a people who made it possible, by electing me as their representative, to give its benefits to all mankind, as they may need, in their direst perils upon the deep.