



The Buzzard

In this issue:

2014 gathering in Arizona 1

Robert J. Walker plaque installed 2

NOAA Award to Walker team 2

Save the date for annual meeting 2

Bilby Tower 3

In memorium 4

Blair Delean is distinguished NOAA officer honor graduate 4

Whistler at Coast Survey 4



Officers

- Cheryl Oliver
President
- Phil Kenul
Vice President
- David Hall
Secretary
- Don Spillman
Treasurer

Directors

- Sam DeBow
- George Leigh
- Craig McLean
- Lynne Mersfelder-Lewis
- Larry Mordock
- Dave Peterson
- Matt Wingate

Advisors

- Jeremy Adams
- John Nyberg
- Jeremy Weirich

uscgsbuzzard@gmail.com
Dawn Forsythe, editor

2014 gathering in Arizona

by Charles and Carol Townsend

Jack and Denise Guth organized this year's C&GS/NOAA gathering on March 25, 26 & 27 in historic, mile-high Jerome, Arizona. What great hosts they were – providing continental breakfasts each morning, and happy hours each evening at their new art gallery, “The Brass Rail,” where we enjoyed viewing Jack’s paintings as well as a beautiful view of the Verde Valley. You can imagine all the “sea” stories that were shared and, at times, it was hard to intervene with one’s own story as there was much passion in the telling of a tale.

On the first full day of the gathering, the Guths organized a tour of the Clemenceau Museum located down the mountain near Cottonwood, and then everyone enjoyed a fine luncheon at the “10/12” in nearby Clarkdale. Then back up the hill where several went on a van tour of Jerome. In the evening we went to the local hamburger place for dinner – not your fast food hamburgers! We ended our three days with a magnificent dinner at The Asylum, Jerome Grand Hotel’s 4-star restaurant. (NOTE: This hotel once was a hospital and is supposedly haunted!)

Attending this year’s gathering were: Bill and Marji Barbee, Sam Baker, Charles Burroughs, John Carpenter, Jack & Denise Guth, George and Dee Poor, Gene Taylor, and Charles and Carol Townsend.

Those who did not attend missed out on a great time to renew friendships and hear all the sea stories. There was some discussion about future gatherings but no decisive action was taken. If someone steps up next year to organize an event, we hope to see you.



George Poor and Jack Guth



Gene Taylor and Bill Barbee

NOAA installs plaque honoring the crew of the Robert J. Walker

On June 20, NOAA celebrated World Hydrography Day by installing a special plaque in the "Gateway to NOAA" exhibition room at the Silver Spring office complex. Last year, we held ceremonies – in Silver Spring and onboard the *Thomas Jefferson* – to remember the 21 lost crew members of the *Robert J. Walker*, a Coast Survey steamer that sank in 1860. We announced then that we would be creating a memorial plaque, based on a design concept offered by LT Jeffrey Shoup.

We've done it, thanks to the financial support of the Office of Coast Survey, OMAO (thank you, Admiral Score), and NOAA Preserve America. Capitol Exhibits design staff took LT Shoup's original concept and made it into reality.

Another plaque – exactly like this one – was hung at the NOAA Basic Officer Training Course facilities in New London, to remind trainees of their heritage.

NOAA award to Walker team

On August 15, NOAA's administrator, Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, announced that the team who worked to find the wreck of the *Robert J. Walker* will receive a 2014 Administrator's Awards at a November ceremony at the NOAA Auditorium in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The employees who are recognized for "locating and identifying the U.S. Coast Survey Steamer *Robert J. Walker* shipwreck, and leading the long-delayed federal tribute to the crew's service" are: James Delgado, Dawn Forsythe, LT Megan Guberski, CAPT Lawrence Krepp, Vitad Pradith, CAPT Albert "Skip" Theberge (ret.), and Todd Walsh.

Congratulations, and thanks to all.

Membership dues in arrears?

The board recently evaluated the membership roll and delinquent dues. Recognizing that interests change as people move to new life phases, the board decided to cancel the membership of people who haven't paid dues for three years or longer. Do you think you are behind in dues?

We will reach out to let you know your status or you can contact membership chair Dave Petersen, at kmpdhp@comcast.net.



LT Jeffrey Shoup with the plaque he designed.

The plaque is a wooden carving. It suggests one of the paddlewheels that the *Walker* used for propulsion – perhaps one of her most identifying features. The mosaic on the upper half of the paddle wheel casing depicts the Jersey shore with an image of the Absecon Light House, and shows the approximate location of the *Walker*'s final resting place. The image of the Walker sailing through the sea uses the NOAA Seagull as the primary wave structure. The final part to the mosaic are the logos of the U.S. Coast Survey, and NOAA representing the history of our agency.

The ship's bell is mounted on the wood carving. The stars represent the lost crew.

The bottom half of the paddlewheel has eight slates, representing the eight ships that were built by the Treasury Department in 1844. Just below the middle of the wheel, a brass plaque enshrines the names of the 21 lost crew members.

Save the date

The 2014 annual meeting and holiday luncheon will take place on December 11,

at the Manor Country Club in Rockville.

More info to come.



Bilby Tower goes up


In a follow-up to his earlier report to the *Buzzard*, that a Bilby Tower was built in Osgood, Indiana in October 2013 in honor of Jasper Bilby, George Leigh reports that the tower was dedicated in June. The dedication ceremony included talks on National Geodetic Survey history and the history of survey towers, and the unveiling of a plaque. For photos of the erection of the tower, see the [Surveyors Historical Society website](#).

George thoughtfully provided the image below...

The Bilby Tower

United States Coast & Geodetic Survey (USC&GS)


A geodetic survey is a survey of a large area of land that compensates for the curvature of the earth. Geodetic surveying began in the United States on February 10, 1807 with the creation of the Survey of the Coast by Congress during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. As the Nation grew westward, surveys of the U.S. interior began. Through the years the agency has been given different names, but today it is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA.



Jasper Sherman Bilby

Jasper Sherman Bilby

Jasper Sherman Bilby was born near Rushville, Indiana on July 16, 1864. At the age of 20, he was hired as a member of the ground crew on his first USC&GS field party and moved to Osgood, Indiana after his marriage to Luella Cox in 1891. He became skilled in signal building (wooden towers) and reconnaissance. In 1926 he decided it was necessary to design a substitute for the wooden tower—one that could be reused and, therefore, decrease the cost of the towers. A year later he supervised the building of the first steel tower. He wrote the original manual on the subject, along with several other publications. He rose through the ranks to Chief Signalman, the highest civilian field position ever held in the USC&GS. Bilby was commended by Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, in 1927. After traveling 511,400 miles and measuring 47,950 miles of line, he retired in 1937. Jasper Sherman Bilby passed away on July 18, 1949 and is interred at Washington Park East Cemetery in Indianapolis, Indiana.




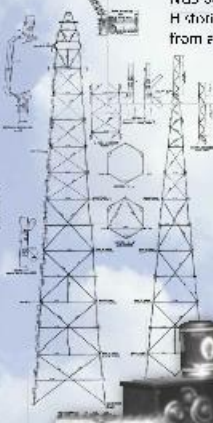
Bilby performs reconnaissance in order to site the new tower.

Origin of the Bilby Tower

When conducting a horizontal geodetic survey, it was often necessary to elevate the instruments in order to clear various obstructions. On early surveys, church spires or live standing trees were used for triangulation sites. When churches and trees were not available, surveyors started to build towers. For 100 years the tower structures were almost always made of wood, but the era of tall wooden towers ended in 1926. Jasper S. Bilby, then Chief Signalman for USC&GS, designed the double tower made of galvanized steel angle iron and rods. The Bilby Tower was actually two towers in one. The inner tower held the survey instruments, while the outer tower held the people—observer, recorder, and lightkeeper. The two towers never touched each other, which isolated vibrations caused by the people moving on the outer tower from the inner tower, thus protecting the survey instruments from movement and creating more accurate readings. The tower's outstanding design saved the United States government over three million dollars (40 million in 2014 dollars) from the years 1927 to 1937. The National Geodetic Survey continued to use Bilby towers until 1984 when advancement in Global Positioning System (GPS) technology made line-of-sight surveying unnecessary.

The Tower

This tower was found on Couba Island in the Barataria Wildlife Preserve, approximately 40 miles south of New Orleans, Louisiana. Since having been erected by NGS in 1972, the tower had remained stable after weathering 18 hurricanes. In the end, it was used to observe flight patterns of migratory birds passing through the area, until it was disassembled and moved to this present site. It was reconstructed in October 2013 by retired and current NGS personnel, members of the Surveyors Historical Society, and other Volunteers from around the country. The inner tower is 64 feet tall and the outer tower is 74 feet tall. This tower is dedicated to the memory of Jasper S. Bilby, former resident of Osgood, Indiana. This basic tower changed the course of history and played an important role in revolutionizing geodetic surveying.



A radio is used for precise time on an astronomic field crew in 1926

Letter to the editor

(Re the article on the Bilby Tower dedication, May 2014)

When the *Buzzard* arrived, it sent a cold chill up my spine. (Don't worry about it.) I am the one who fell 50 feet from a tower in 1959, broke my back and legs. Went back to work later as the gravity observer and on to Chief Of Party G-52. Am retired here in Fort Davis, Texas. Still able to walk and all that, but have pain every day. The picture of the tower just brought back memories of what I went through. Am still afraid of heights!

Glad that the towers are not to be forgotten.

Charles H. Bergmann



In memorium

Retired Captain James Markwood Wintermyre, passed away at age 73 on April 9 at his home in Boones Borough, Bend, OR with his wife, Karen (Ota), and son, Jim, Jr. at his bedside. Jim received his NOAA commission in 1964. During his 23-year career, he served as a junior officer on the USC&GS ships *Hodgson*, *Pathfinder*, and *Surveyor*; as executive officer on the NOAA Ship *Fairweather*; and as commanding officer on the *Davidson*. He retired in 1987. [More...](#)

Bill Stoney, former oceanographic division chief at CO-OPS, passed on July 6, in Rockville, Maryland. Bill was 65 years old. He is survived by his wife Gina, son Brent, and daughter Samantha Holmes.

We send our heartfelt thoughts to all of our Society families who have lost loved ones.

(Please email the Buzzard editor at uscgsbuzzard@gmail.com about members who have passed.)

Blair Delean is distinguished NOAA officer graduate

Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, NOAA administrator, recently presented Ensign Blair J. Delean with the NOAA Distinguished Honor Graduate Award, sponsored by the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Heritage Society. The award recognizes the Basic Officer Training Course graduate with the highest overall average in academics, service aptitude, and personal and professional qualities. This is the first year the Society is sponsoring this award.

Delean reported to the NOAA Corps Officer Training Center on January 9 for BOTC class 123. Prior to joining NOAA, Delean was a special investigator conducting security clearance background investigations in the Washington D.C. metro area for United States Investigative Services. Before that, he held an internship with the White House Council on Environmental Quality in Washington, D.C., specifically tasked as an intern for the National Ocean Council. Ensign Delean graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park, in 2010 with a Bachelor of Science degree. His field of study was environmental science and policy with a concentration in marine and coastal management.

Delean's first assignment is with NOAA Ship [Oscar Elton Sette](#).



Whistler hints at artistic flair during Coast Survey stint

Over its 200-year history, Coast Survey has employed men who are preeminent in their fields. Most of the time, their career successes follow traditional professional trajectories – but at least one Coast Survey alum's ultimate renown was born of his failure. James McNeill Whistler (1834 – 1903), the American artist



best known for his painting colloquially known as “Whistler’s Mother,” was briefly and unhappily employed in the drawing division of the U.S. Coast Survey in 1854 and 1855.

Whistler came to Coast Survey at the age of 20, after he was asked to leave West Point over an argument with a professor of chemistry there. As Whistler tells it, “The Professor would not agree with me that silicon was a gas, but declared it was a metal; and as we could come to no agreement in the matter, it was suggested – all in the most courteous and correct West Point way – that perhaps I had better leave the Academy.” Read more on the [NOAA Coast Survey blog](#).