

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property:

historic name Matton Shipyard

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Delaware Avenue ☐ not for publication

city or town Cohoes ☒ vicinity

state New York code NY county Albany code 001 zip code 12047

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Ruth Purpura DBAPC 6/5/09
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

Matton Shipyard

Name of Property

Albany County, New York

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

☐ private

☐ public-local

☒ public-State

☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

☐ building(s)

☒ district

☐ site

☐ structure

☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

08

0

buildings

06

0

sites

04

02

structures

07

0

objects

25

02

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/Specialty Store- Shipyard and repair facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

7. Description:

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Industrial

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Wood (weatherboard)

roof Asphalt shingles; rolled-roof

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation Sheet

Matton Shipyard

Name of Property

Albany County, New York

County and State

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations

(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ B removed from its original location.

☐ C a birthplace or grave.

☐ D a cemetery.

☐ E a reconstructed building, object or structure.

☐ F a commemorative property.

☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering

Record #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

MARITIME HISTORY

TRANSPORTATION

INDSUTRY (manufacturing)

Period of Significance

1916-1959

Significant Dates

1916; 1941-5. 1949.

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Primary location of additional data

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository:

Matton Shipyard

Name of Property

Albany County, New York

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 4.13 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 607934 4737115
Zone Easting Northing

2

3
Zone Easting Northing

4

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Travis Bowman

organization New York State Historic Preservation Office date _____

street & number Peebles Island State Park, Box 189 telephone 518-237-8643 x 3259

city or town Waterford state New York zip code 12188

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name New York State Parks and Recreation

street & number P.O. Box 189 telephone (518) 537-4240

city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Matton Shipyard, Cohoes
Albany County, New York

Section number 7 Page 1

Description

The Matton Shipyard consists of eight extant buildings, various surviving features and several archaeological resources relating to the site's history as an industrial and manufacturing facility. Almost all of the resources date to the period of 1916-1983 when the site functioned as a shipyard, repair facility and towboat operation for the New York State Barge Canal, and the related Champlain Canal. The shipyards occupy a roughly 200 x 100 yard parcel near the northern tip of Van Schaick Island, logically suited to take advantage of the nearby confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. The property is defined by the historic, WWII era, fence that surrounds the shipyard. As essential functions of the shipyard historically did not take place outside of this marker, it is a logical choice for delineating the boundary. Although it's located within the town of Cohoes, Albany County, Van Schaick Island is very close to Saratoga County and Rensselaer County; both are easily visible from its shores. In fact, the proximity of Van Schaick Island to the shore meant there was little isolation, even historically. It was easily accessible in the early twentieth century when John E. Matton chose the location. Two bridges connected Van Schaick to Cohoes (west bank), one to Troy (east bank) and the Delaware & Hudson Railroad ran across Van Schaick Island, Green Island (to the south) and Peebles Island (to the north) as a bridge line connecting to several major routes. The extant structures at Matton Shipyard date to both the earliest operations on the site (c. 1916) and to its expansion during Word War II, with almost no non-historic infill.

The following is a comprehensive list of historic and non-historic features in the Matton Shipyard Site:
[N.B. Using numbering system created in 1989 report on Matton Shipyards by New York State Senior Landscape Architect Harry Earle, which has been added to in order to reflect previously unnumbered structures:]¹

A) Extant Buildings:

1. Office/Stores, c1916/17

This structure consists of three separate blocks on a linear plan. The west block served as a garage and storage room (first floor) and the offices for the Matton Shipping Company (second floor). It is a two-story, end gable-roofed building with shiplap siding and an asphalt-shingle roof. It has several windows on the northern and southern elevations, along with a large overhead door and four other doors. The west block is the only part of the building with a chimney. The 1918 plan for Matton Shipyard shows an "Automobile Garage" attached the west end; the garage had a second floor added and has been incorporated into the overall building at a later date. The center block connecting the two terminal buildings served as a storage building, it was labeled as "1 story shed" on the 1918 plan. It has two doors on the southern elevation, each entering into a separate partition inside the block. It is a one-story with a gently sloping metal shed roof and shiplap siding, specifically the roofline and roofing materials do not match the other two blocks. The center block does not show-up photos of a 1936 flood at Matton Shipyard, it may have been too heavily damaged to have been salvaged. As a result, the center block was probably updated or changed during the 1936-43 period. The east block was labeled "paint and oil storage" on the 1964 plan and simply "1 story shed" on the 1918 plan. It is a one-and-a-half-story gable-roofed block with a large central door and shiplap siding and asphalt-shingle roof. Neither the center or east blocks have windows on the main elevations, but the east block has one window on the gable end. All three blocks are built on concrete foundations.

¹ Earle, Harry B: State of New York Executive Department, Office of General Services, Division of Land Utilization. Form: "Declaration of Surplus Buildings and/or Improvements (DLU 70 (10/74))." Completed 18 September 1989, documenting extant conditions at the site. Earle modified the 1964 Rosenfeldt Survey Map for these reports, numbering the extant buildings onsite.

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3. *Watchman's Building c1936-43.*

The watchman's building is a one-story, gable-roofed frame building. The original structure may have pre-dated World War II, but was it not onsite during the 1936 flood. The building contained an office, locker area and storage area. The current structure is a one-story, gabled-roof building with an asphalt roof and shiplap siding. A 5'8" porch extends the length of the building on the northern elevation. The porch has a shed roof with rolled-roofed covering and extends two feet beyond the building towards the west.

4. *Sheet Metal Shop, c1937/8*

One-story shed roofed frame building with shiplap siding. East elevation has large central door, smaller entrance door and two windows. North end elevation has large door. Ralph Folger Oral History interview states building constructed 1937/8 to house tug engines.

5. *Carpenter Shop, 1916, & between 1936-43 (north block addition).*

The carpenter shop is a one-and-half frame building with an asphalt-shingled, monitor roof and shiplap siding. A framed, shed-roofed north block addition with a rolled roof was constructed later. A projecting, one-story addition with matching roofline extends the building to the east. Situated atop a raised concrete pillars. A bank of clerestory windows allowed for significant light into the shop, these windows appear to still be extant. Each elevation has a varied combination of windows and doors, most have been altered over time.

6. *Stores Building, c1941-3.*

One-story frame building with gabled, asphalt roof and shiplap siding. It has a small frame, shed-roofed ell on the east elevation and a small framed, shed roofed addition on the south elevation. According to a 1993 oral history interview with former Matton employee Ralph Folger, the "building south of the machine shop was built during WWII for navy supplies."²

8. *Pipe Shop, c1936-43.*

One-story frame building with asphalt-shingled, gabled roof and shiplap siding. North gable elevation has two windows, east elevation has center entrance and two flanking windows. West gable end had small shed-roofed porch (now lost).

9. *Pitch Building, pre-1936*

This one-story gable-roofed frame building with rolled-roof may have been swept away in the 1936 flood. Its alignment is slightly different in the 1936 flood photos and the 1943/1949 shipyard photos. Matton built its first all steel boat in 1938, but continued to produce wooden boats as well. East elevation has large outward-swinging door.

12. *Garage, c.1916*

This building appeared on the 1918 map as an open front shed. This stores building is a one-and-a-half-story gable-roofed frame building with a one-story shed-roofed extension to the east. Both blocks have a rolled-roof, shiplap siding and poured concrete foundation. It has twelve outward facing barn-type doors and one window each on both the north and south elevation.

² Oral History interview of Ralph Folger 13 October, 1993. Conducted by Paul Huey and George Hamell. Notes/highlights of interview included in NYSOPRHP memorandum TO: Kris Gibbons FROM: Paul Huey dated 15 October, 1993. Central Files, Peebles Island, Matton Shipyard Files.

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12A. *Electric Building*. Concrete block construction. Unknown date, probably WWII era.
Rectangular concrete block construction.

B) Extant Features (Contributing):

1. *Flagpole*. Erected 1918.
2. *Dock*: Projects into water on east side of shipyards (Hudson River).
3. *Steel Launching ramps*: Historic photos indicate the presence of five large ramps used to slide boats into water. Due to the relative shallowness of river, boats were launched sideways. Three of the ramps still exist, though modified from their original form. Unknown if more exist underwater.
4. *Fence*. Erected during World War II to ensure security in the shipyards.
5. *Camels* (A floating device acting as a fender and used to separate a moored vessel from a pier, wharf, quay, or other vessels.).. Unknown date. Six extant. Treated wood with iron fittings and mooring rings.

C) Extant Features (Non-Contributing)

1. *Two steel sand storage silos* (non-contributing). Although related to Matton's ship-buildings operations onsite, these facilities for storing and dispensing sand were added to the site after the period of significance. Probably dating to the 1960s, their non-contributing status is entirely due to age.

D) Changes to the site: Ruined or lost buildings:

[N.B. Using numbering system created in 1989 report on Matton Shipyards by New York State Senior Landscape Architect Harry Earle, which has been added to in order to reflect previously unnumbered structures. The report did not have a building #11]

2. *Warehouse and Molding Loft (ruins)*. c. 1942-5.

Extant in a 1989 survey, it collapsed in 1993. The building was built during the early years of World War II (1942/3) as a barracks to house military personnel stationed at the site. A second story was added later in the war (1944/5) as a large open space and molding loft according to a Ralph Folger oral history interview. The one-story structure was a gable-ended rectangular building with a rolled roof and appears to have had shiplap siding. The second story had banks of several windows and was accessible by an exterior staircase.

7. *Stores*. Between 1936-43.

Extant in a 1989 survey, it is now lost. The building was a simple, nearly-square planned, gable-roofed building with a rolled-roof and ship-lap siding. The 1943 photos show two windows on the south elevation. It is unknown what was stored here.

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10. Small Garage. Post-1964

This building was extant in a 1989 survey, it is now lost. It was listed as a frame structure, wood siding with asphalt shingle roof. It did not appear on the 1964 survey map prepared for the sale of Matton Shipyard and therefore post-dated Matton Family occupation.

13. Steel Utility Building. Post-1964

This building was extant in a 1989 survey, it is now lost. It did not appear on the 1964 survey map prepared for the sale of Matton Shipyard and therefore post-dated Matton Family occupation.

*14. Vertical Steel Plate Storage-No clear photographic evidence exists to describe structure.**15. Welding and Bending-No clear photographic evidence exists to describe structure.**16. Latrine. unknown construction date, appears in 1942 photo.*

Appeared in 1964 survey, but was either lost by 1989 or not included in survey. It was a small, rectangular, one-story structure with a gable roof. The narrow elevation end had a single door, the long elevations had a row of six windows, though it is unknown if they contained glass or were simply open space. Employee Ralph Folger recalled the outhouse sat perched on the river's edge. Aerial view of vegetation shows former extent of building.

17. Compressor and Tool Shop (ruins) c.1916.

Appeared in 1964 survey, but was lost by 1989. Appears on 1918 map as "Engine Room" "Saw Mill" and "Tool Shed" with a skidway for the saw mill attached. The building was a 1 1/2 story gable-roofed structure with flanking shed roof one story blocks. The SE block appears on the 1918 map as the Saw Mill, in the 1943 pictures this wing does not sit on a concrete foundation but rather is raised on blocks, it is unknown when the NW block was added. The siding appears to match the shiplap siding seen at Matton Shipyard, the roof is not visible enough to determine.

18. Storage/Machine Shop (ruins) c.1916.

Appears on 1918 map as "Blacksmith Shop" and "Iron Shed" but was listed as "ruins" in 1989 survey. The original building appears to have been a 1 1/2 story, end gabled building with a 1 story flat-roofed projecting ell. By the 1940s a shed-roofed addition projected to the SW side. The siding appears to match the shiplap siding seen at Matton Shipyard, the roof is not visible enough to determine.

19. Sand House pre-1964

This building appears on the 1964 survey but is not visible in any historic views available for the nomination. It was lost by 1989.

20. Oil Shed. c.1916

Gable roofed structure east of the offices. Appears on 1918 map as "Oil Shed" and visible in the 1949 photos, but lost by the 1964 survey. A gabled ended building, the siding appears to match the shiplap siding seen at Matton Shipyard, the roof is not visible enough to determine. The small structure in the 1918 survey map is not visible in the 1936 flood photos and may have been completely rebuilt as a result.

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21. Shed roofed structure south corner of #2-No clear photographic evidence to describe structure.

22. Shed roofed structure northeast of #15 in line with other buildings on row-No clear photographic evidence exists to describe structure.

23. *Saw and Planning Building. c.1916.*

Monitor roofed structure with the shiplap siding seen at Matton Shipyard, the roof is not visible enough to determine. It appears on 1918 map as a "Store House" but a much larger structure visible in 1936 flood photos. 1964 plans indicated the building was "Saw & Planning Building." A framework of steel girders surrounded the building, even by 1936.

Other extinct/lost features:

Crane Track and Crane: The crane was sold in the 1980s; but the track is probably still buried onsite. No archaeological investigations have been conducted at Matton Shipyard to confirm this.

Floating Dry Dock: Matton's floating dry dock was a key component of the shipyard's longevity and success. As no archaeological investigations have been conducted at Matton Shipyard, it is unknown if buried or associated artifacts exist.

Steam boiler for bending wood (lost).

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Statement of Significance

The Matton Shipyard is significant under criteria A and C as a rare surviving inland shipyard directly related to New York State Barge Canal. The Barge Canal was primarily an enlargement and modernization of its more famous predecessor, the Erie Canal, but also included work on the other three chief branches of the state canal system—the Champlain, the Oswego and the Cayuga & Seneca Canals. Inland navigation had been instrumental to the economic success of New York State, but the Barge Canal was an extraordinarily ambitious public works project. New York State would have to transform the nineteenth century Erie Canal with its animal-powered boats into a large twentieth century waterway with tug-driven barges, with no assurance of success. Despite the inherent risk, shipwright John E. Matton decided to tie his fate to the new canal system. He relocated his family shipyard to the Hudson River at Van Schaick Island, perfectly situated near the new eastern terminus of the new Barge Canal. His risk paid off; for the next fifty years, Matton Shipyard enjoyed a distinguished reputation for building and repairing boats, as well as for its commercial tug-boating operations. Matton tugs plied the waterways of the canal system. Matton barges carried grain, oil, war materiel and countless other products across the 525 miles of the Barge Canal and along the Hudson River. Matton warships even patrolled American and Russian waters for German subs in World War II. The shipyard did more than just build boats. The Matton dry dock, the only such privately owned facility on the canal, allowed its workers to repair the vessels that were the lifeblood of the system. Matton Shipyard followed a parallel course with the Barge Canal, changing and adapting with time. The site today has several surviving buildings and features from the half-century of Matton family operation of the site (1916-1964); the high degree of integrity allows the nominated property to maintain its readability as a shipyard.

Barge Canal

The history of New York's Erie Canal is full of dualities. The idea of the canal had been around since the early eighteenth century, but even as digging began in 1817, many still considered the project a fanciful dream at best. By 1826 it was being hailed as the eighth wonder of the world, and within a decade it was being enlarged for the first time. Between 1836 and 1862 the canal was enlarged to 70 feet wide (from 40') and 7 feet deep (from 4'), and included a reduction in the number of locks from 83 to 72.¹ A disastrous (and later abortive) nine million dollar attempted enlargement in the 1890s led to a special commission being convened by Governor Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt's engineers undertook an analysis that combined improvement feasibility with profitability projections, and by 1903, New York State decided to enlarge the canal. The feeder canals like the Champlain and Oswego were to be enlarged along with the Erie Canal, and the entire new system would be known as the Barge Canal. Work began in 1903, but progressed slowly in the beginning. Wartime pressures of World War I forced a year-long federalization of the canal, and this federal oversight allowed the whole system to be complete and operational by 1918.² The end product was remarkable—New Yorkers now had a canal that could economically compete with railroads, could handle barges of 3,000 tons (the Erie Canal had been limited to boats of ~240 tons) and was an engineering marvel ten-times longer than its contemporary at the Isthmus of Panama.

Matton Family Shipworks

The original location of the Matton family shipyard and works was not on Van Schaick Island, but further north on the Champlain Canal, about three miles above Waterford, NY near (then) Lock #6. Both Peter Jesse Matton (c.1842-1923) and his son John E. Matton (1879-1959) listed their occupation as "shipbuilder" on the June, 1900

¹ Frank Sadowski, Jr. Dragon Design Associates. 2000-2007. <http://www.eriecanal.org/index.html>

² Noble Whitford, *History of the Barge Canal in New York State: Supplement to the Annual Report of the State Engineer and Surveyor for the Year Ended June 30, 1921*. New York State. Chapter XV *passim*.

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Federal Census, but no record of either man could be found prior to that. The family's traditional founding date for their Waterford Dry Dock is 1900, though this is more likely be the date that John E. took over the business.³ By 1910, John E. Matton was advertising his business as: "boats built, repaired and thoroughly overhauled." The planning stages of the Barge Canal probably made for uncertain times for the Mattons; the future of the family dry-dock in Waterford was literally riding on New York's decisions over viability, proposed routes, etc. Proposals to abandon the Champlain Canal would have made their facility entirely obsolete. An enlargement of the canal and a decision to keep the feeder canals, however, could provide an economic boon. When New York made its recommendations and began work, John E. Matton made a crucial and ultimately lucrative choice to relocate his business. He purchased land on the Hudson River at Van Schaick Island in June of 1916, and construction of the first buildings at the nominated property probably began that same year.⁴ The island was exceptionally well-located to take advantage of the new Barge Canal, as historian Charles O' Malley stated: "the traffic of the entire canal system would pass by his door."⁵

To create an effective shipyard John Matton had a dock constructed and a track-based, moveable crane installed. Hoping to recreate the success at Waterford, Matton had a portion of the Hudson River blasted to construct a new floating dry-dock. Based on a 1918 map of the property, the shipyard began its life with seven buildings. An office and storage building with a small attached automobile garage was the base of business operations. A 1 1/2 story planning mill and machine shop (later known as the carpenter's shop) became a focal point for the yard with its distinctive monitor roofline, banks of clerestory windows and painted lettering proudly advertising "JOHN E. MATTON & SON, INC" to canal traffic (before his son joined the firm, the sign read "John E. Matton Barge Plant"). A second industrial building housed the saw mill/engine room and tool shed, and a third specialized building housed the blacksmith and iron shed. In addition to the storage space below the office building, the complex also had a large open-front shed, an "oil shed" and a dedicated store house. Matton's ship-building philosophy consisted of controlling every facet of construction from the ground up—Matton boasted he could build anything needed to build a tug.⁶ This philosophy required having a reasonably large work force capable of fabricating every component of the ship, and having enough workspaces and storage areas to house and support these various processes. The Matton Shipyard also maintained a highly trafficked repair shop for all manner of canal boats and an active tugboat fleet, requiring more specialized staffing and buildings to accommodate these functions. Of the seven original buildings at Matton Shipyard, three are extant, including the office and the distinctive carpenter shop. Along with the buildings, there are various bollards scattered along the perimeter, the dock, several camels (floating fenders used to separate a moored vessel from a pier), the historic launching ways and bulkhead are also present, allowing the site to retain much of its earliest character.

First World War

The firm enjoyed great financial success during World War I. Inland waterways like the Barge Canal and Hudson River became absolutely vital in maintaining the supply-line of war materiel to the US and its allies, and the workhorse of this system was the canal boat. Canal boats ferried goods from the interior and Great Lakes across New York State and into New York City where they fed the cross-Atlantic supply vessels. The New York State Engineer proclaimed the job of completing the canal and linking the supply-line would "outweigh the work of an

³ Charles O'Malley, *Low Bridges and High Water on the New York State Barge Canal*. (Manatee Printers: FL, 1991), 139.

⁴ Kristin Gibbons, *The Matton Shipyard*. (New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation: Waterford, 1991), 3.

⁵ O'Malley, *Low Bridges and High Water*, 140.

⁶ O'Malley, *Low Bridges and High Water*, 67.

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entire army corps.”⁷ More boats meant more supplies could be moved more rapidly. Matton Shipyard received a wartime contract to build fourteen wooden barges, most of which were destined for New York City. Reporter Jerome Smith’s 1917 *Knickerbocker Press* article explained the work going on at the shipyard. According to Smith, Matton Shipyard was employing thirty-five men and using the latest technologies like a compressed-air driven saw which could do work of “ten men.”⁸ Smith reported the shipyard had six barges currently under construction and the capacity to build fifteen barges per year. In the same article, John E. Matton told Smith that shipyard was severely understaffed—employing less than half the men needed to build at full capacity.

Interwar years

The shipyard appears to have experienced modest growth during the interwar years. John’s only son Ralph joined the business in 1920, and the business was subsequently incorporated as John E. Matton and Son, Inc. Although militarization of the canal had slowed traffic in 1918 (there was very little traffic going west), traffic increased steadily, about 7-15% per annum, after federal control ended.⁹ As the fortunes of the canal rose, so did those of Matton Shipyards. The 1930s saw the purchase of additional lands for the shipyard, 200 feet north of the first plot.¹⁰ Examination of a series of 1936 photos documenting the massive flood of that year shows new buildings and growth. A former storehouse had been enlarged and ringed with a framework of steel girders to accommodate a more functional role, that of sawing and planing. A building dedicated to pitch storage had been added near the river, as had a new facility building for welding and bending. The pitch storage building probably may have been the earliest of these buildings. Pitch (tar, resin, wood tar etc.) would have been absolutely crucial to Matton’s wooden ship and barge construction; it was used as both a preservative and caulking material. The flood also damaged a snow-fence factory on the property beyond repair; the short-lived enterprise was not reopened afterwards.¹¹

Three years after the flood, Matton Shipyards experienced two events which had a profound impact on the company. John E. Matton, founder and key executive of the company, suffered a debilitating stroke. The stroke left John unable to run the company, though he visited the site everyday. His son and partner Ralph assumed full control of running daily operations. Later in 1939, under Ralph’s direction, the company saw the launching of its first all-steel tug, appropriately named the John E. Matton.¹² Although extant photo documentation of the shipyard from 1939 is not known, at least three buildings may have been directly related to these new operations. Photographic evidence confirms the steel-plate storage building, a sheet metal shop, and a pipe shop were all onsite at Matton Shipyards by 1943; these structures are probably associated with this new steel era.

Second World War

Not surprisingly, the Second World War had the largest impact on the operations and architecture at the Matton Shipyard. Examination of a series of 1943 photos and a pair of 1949 ship-launching photos reveals a vibrant shipyard with several new buildings added since the 1936 flood. Naval contracts provided the impetus behind most of the expansion. A chain-link fence was added around the entire shipyard, with access controlled through a single entrance and limited to only authorized personnel. Monitoring this entrance gate was a new (or possibly enlarged) watchman’s building with attached guard dog kennels in the rear. The watchman’s building even had a porch

⁷ Whitford, *History of the Barge Canal*, 333.

⁸ Smith, Jerome. “War Barges Under Construction at Waterford Yard” in *Knickerbocker Press*. August 3, 1917. Albany, NY.

⁹ Whitford, *History of the Barge Canal*, 385-90.

¹⁰ Gibbons, *The Matton Shipyard*, 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Figure 23.

¹² O’Malley, *Low Bridges and High Water*, 165-6.

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extending two feet beyond the building to provide shelter for the watchman all the way to the perimeter fence. Barracks were constructed for military personnel stationed at the shipyards, a second story had to be added between 1943-5.¹³ Three other new buildings appear in the photos, all were labeled as storage facilities in the 1964 survey. A 1993 oral history interview with former Matton employee Ralph Folger specifically noted the "building south of the machine shop was built during WWII for navy supplies."¹⁴

Matton Shipyard built five tugs for the US Army during the war, and continued their own commercial tug operations (including an oil barge). For the first time, the yard also constructed warships, most notably six sub-chasers, designations SC-985 through SC-989. The ultimate fate of the Matton sub-chasers is unknown. SC-987 was lend-leased to the Soviet Union and SC-988 was transferred to US Coast Guard control post-war and re-designated the Air Oriole, no other information could be located.

As it had been in the First World War, the Barge Canal system was essential to the US war effort. German submarine attacks posed serious threats to American and Allied shipping in the Atlantic, so protected inland water routes like the Barge Canal system became an increasingly practical and attractive option for moving war materiel. Traffic on the canal increased as a result, generating profits for Matton Shipyard's repair facility and tug operations on top of those reaped from their military contracts. The effect of Matton Shipyard's success on local community and economy was palpable. Newspaper articles detailed the pride the community took in launching the sub-chasers, speakers at the ceremonies proclaimed that the locals were doing their part at stopping Nazism.¹⁵ Employment soared. In May, 1941, the firm reported a workforce of 130 men, 25 of whom worked in the yard itself.¹⁶ At its height near the end of the war, 340 people worked for the Matton Shipyard, and the wartime changes to the shipyard, its workforce and its operations had been profound.

The end of Matton-family ownership

The immediate post-war period was a time of uncertainty. Markets and industries had to adapt to the abrupt loss of government contracts and the burst wartime boon bubble. For the Matton Shipyard, like many businesses, it was often fraught with financial setbacks; a study of the financial records revealed the company was often facing serious capital shortages and was borrowing extensively to keep afloat.¹⁷ Adding to the late 1940s economic doldrums, the close-knit family business was dealt another blow; in 1948 John E. Matton suffered a second stroke, ending even his ability to make his traditional daily visit to the beloved shipyard he had founded. The severity of the stroke forced him to remain hospitalized until his death in 1959.

The economy, the Barge Canal and Matton Shipyard all eventually recovered. In 1948, the Oil Transfer Company of New York ordered a massive oil barge 210 x 43 x 15 feet, and Matton Shipyard would launch the vessel a year later (see continuation sheet). In launching the oil barge, Matton Shipyard serves a paradigm for the changing role of the Barge Canal and the economy as a whole. In 1921 the giant Standard Oil began to use Barge Canal, and oil barges became an increasingly regular sight thereafter. In World War II, 168,000 barrels of oil were shipped across the

¹³ Gibbons, *The Matton Shipyard*, 5.

¹⁴ Oral History interview of Ralph Folger 13 October, 1993. Conducted by Paul Huey and George Hamell. Notes/highlights of interview included in NYSOPRHP memorandum TO: Kris Gibbons FROM: Paul Huey dated 15 October, 1993. Central Files, Peebles Island, Matton Shipyard Files.

¹⁵ "Area Built Boat Sent to get Axis Submarines" Unknown Author. *The Times Record* (Troy, NY). 19 September 1942.

¹⁶ Gibbons, *The Matton Shipyard*, 5.

¹⁷ O'Malley, *Low Bridges and High Water*, 171.

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canal daily¹⁸ and by the end of the war, petroleum and gasoline shipments on the canal had outpaced traditional grain shipments as the principle commodity. When the Oil Transfer barge was launched, much of New York State depended on barges to supply heating oil and kerosene.¹⁹ Despite the changing role of the yard, 1949 photos of the launching reveal only two new buildings had been added since 1943—a small storage shed storage and a building to store the vertical plates that Matton Shipyards would bend, roll and shape into hulls.

Growth through the decade of the 1950s was slow. During the Korean Conflict, Matton Shipyards once again was awarded US military contracts, building scows and tugs for the Army and Navy, some of which reportedly were sent to Guam. By the 1960s, the yard was in decline. John E. Matton, the founder and family patriarch died January 15, 1959. Ralph Matton followed four years later in 1963 at the age of 64, and active Matton family involvement and ownership in their shipyard could not survive the losses of its guiding forces. Ralph's wife Margaret managed to keep the firm active only until the last boat was launched in 1964, and the company was sold out of the family on October 30, 1964. The firm had built seventeen boats since the end of the war, the last was aptly named the JOHN E. MATTON, the fourth such boat to bear the designation.²⁰ Margaret died less than a year after selling the shipyard founded by her late father-in-law. The name Matton Shipyard remained, but the firm of Matton & Son, Inc. was dissolved in February of 1964 after almost fifty years of service on the Barge Canal. Matton Shipyard continued to turn out boats under new ownership, but the pace of business had slowed considerably. The MARY TURECAMO was the last boat built by the yard, and the 345th hull launched since its inception.²¹ The shipyard ceased operations in 1983. Donald Miller, Inc. purchased the property in 1984 for use as a commercial sandblasting operation. New York State purchased the property from Miller in 1989 and it is now part of the Peebles Island State Park Complex.

Conclusion:

"The role that the Troy area plays in American shipping was illustrated this morning when the John E. Matton and Sons [sic], Inc., shipbuilding yards in Cohoes launched its 327th vessel since the company was formed in 1900": The writer of this *Times Record* (Troy, NY) article of August 11, 1959 went on to explain that Ralph E. Matton gave a speech to his employees documenting the important history of their company. Although his words are not recorded, the history and significance of Matton Shipyard are intimately tied to the canal system it served. In the very genesis of the Barge Canal, when large barges and self-powered tugs would replace the mules of the old Eire Canal, Matton Shipyard provided barges and operated tugs to make the new canal work. Its turn of the century ship-building philosophy gave it a reputation for quality that allowed it flourish and grow, adding new structures as technology and business allowed. Through two World Wars, Matton Shipyards kept America's war machine rolling—dependably delivering goods, services and ships along New York's safe inland water routes and beyond. When the nature of the canal changed due to New Yorker's demand for petroleum, Matton Shipyard adapted to the times and continued its relevance to the modern economy. Some of its buildings survive from the earliest incarnation of the shipyard, while others speak to the immense needs of World War II. The shipyard constantly provided employment for the local community, and was a source of pride during the war years and beyond. When it became increasingly obvious that Matton Shipyard would have to relocate, every launching was viewed as the possible ending to the era that John E. Matton had begun in 1916. The author of a December, 1982 article for

¹⁸ Pees, Samuel. "Oil History" 2004. <http://www.petroleumhistory.org/OilHistory/pages/barges/bargecanal.html>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Gibbons, *The Matton Shipyard*, 7-8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

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Troy's *Sunday Record* noted the warm bond the locals had with the yard: "So it appears that the Matton 'fog horn' heard by Cohoes and Lansingburgh residents at starting and quitting time and at lunch and coffee break times, will continue to proclaim the Matton shipyard presence at least in the immediate future."²² The Barge Canal itself was changing, and shipyards were failing across New York State. The Matton Shipyard may be the only known extant inland shipyards on the Barge Canal that is still readable to its original function. Despite its regional and local importance in shipbuilding up until the 1980s, the date of significance cannot be justified beyond the fifty year mark at this time.

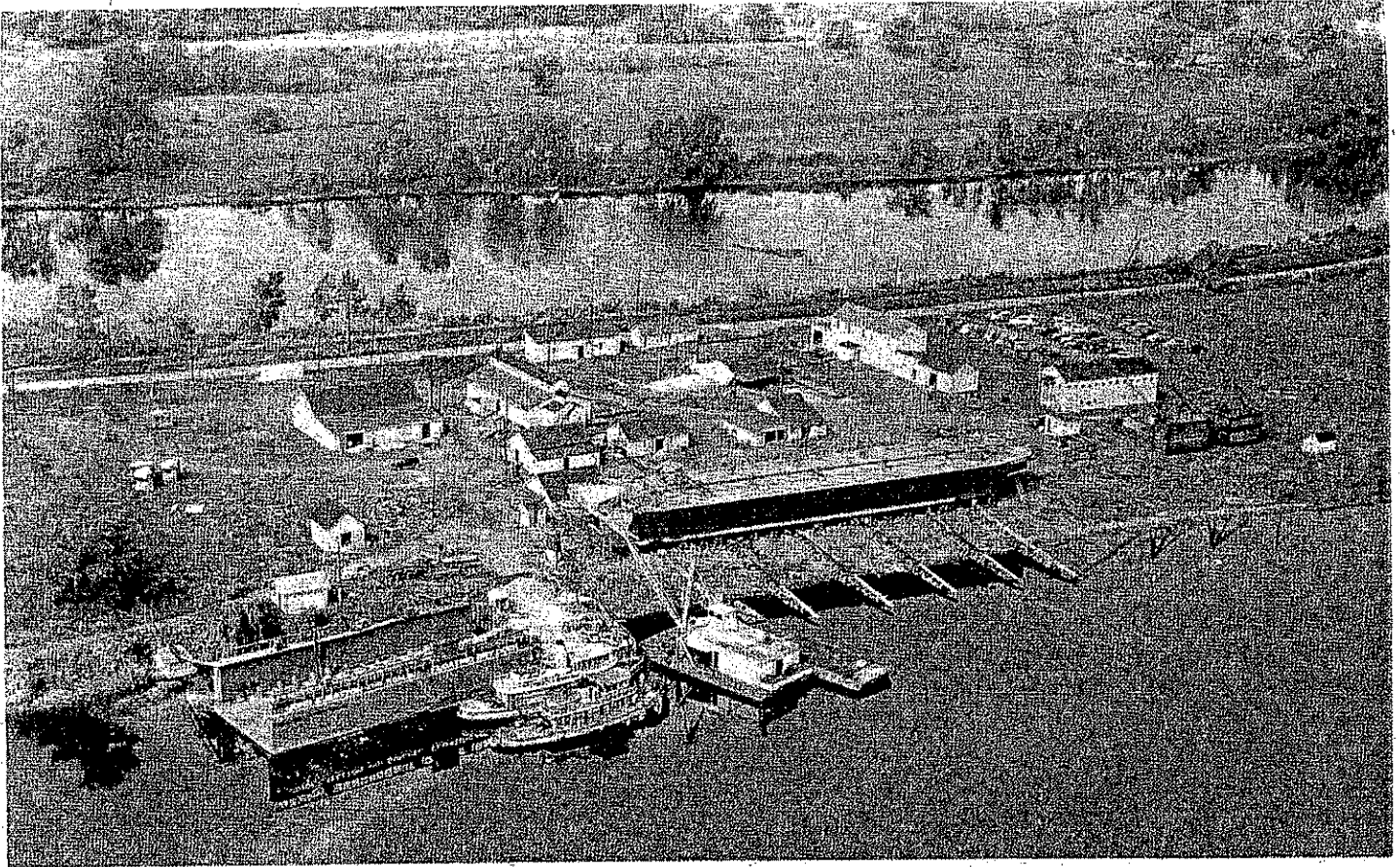
²² John Scanlon, "Cohoes shipyard keeps its boats 'in the family' *The Sunday Record* (Troy, NY). 24 October 1982.

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1949 Photo of the launching of the Oil transfer barge.



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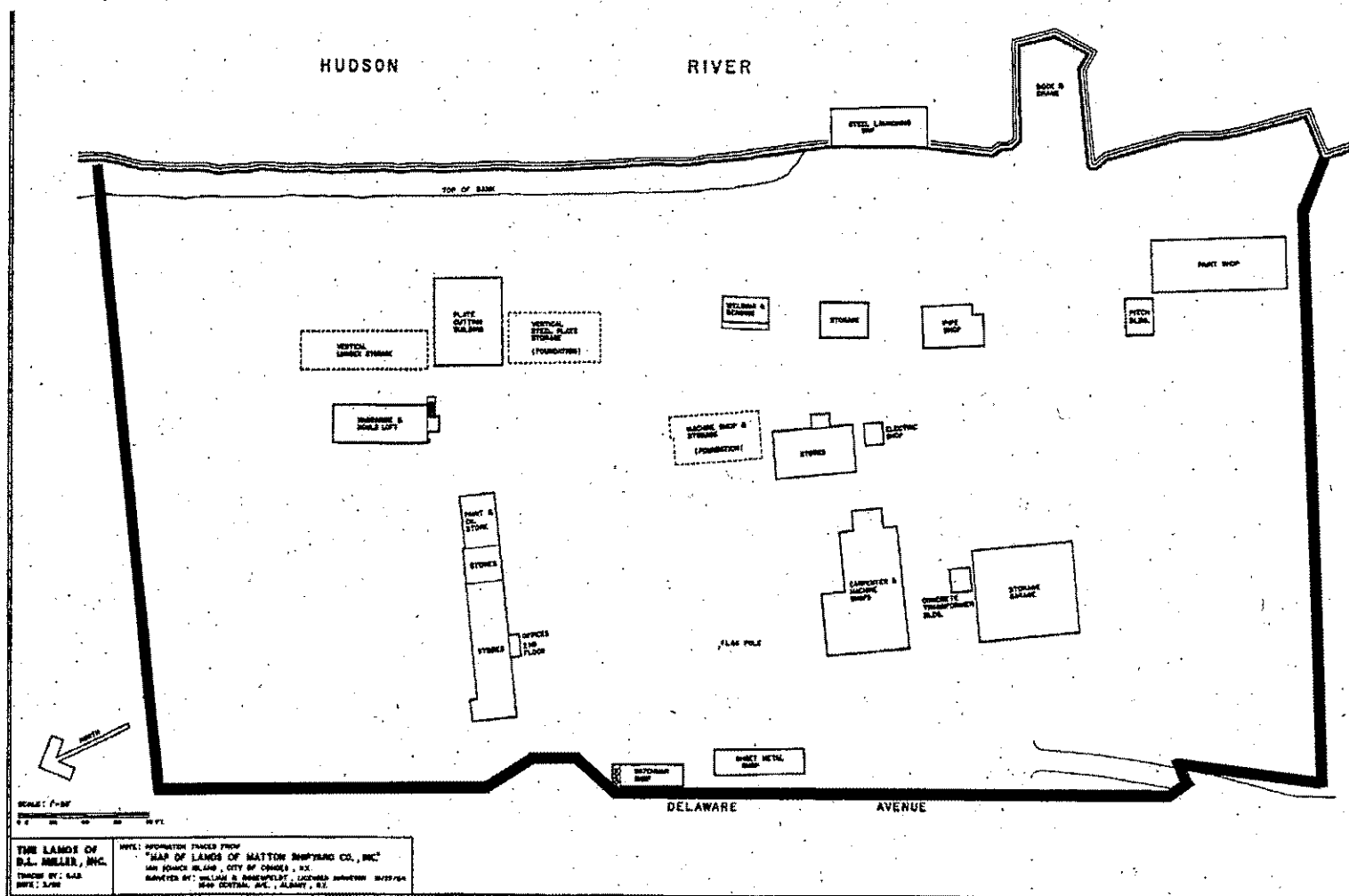
BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nominated property consists of a roughly rectilinear 720 x 400' parcel bordered by the Hudson River on the east and Delaware Avenue on the west, situated near the northern end of Van Schaick Island in the City of Cohoes. The irregular contours of the boundary are indicated by a heavy black line on the attached map.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The nominated property includes the entire area within the historic WWII-era fence surrounding the property. This fence line represents the largest historical geographical limit of Matton Shipyards, and no structures associated with the Matton family or with shipbuilding activity are known to have existed beyond this. The nominated parcel is currently owned by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation as part of Peebles Island State Park. All lands on Peebles Island itself were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, prior to New York State ownership of the nominated property; Peebles Island was National Register listed under a different area of significance. The nominated parcel only includes lands historically associated with shipbuilding activities during the 1916-1959 period of significance.

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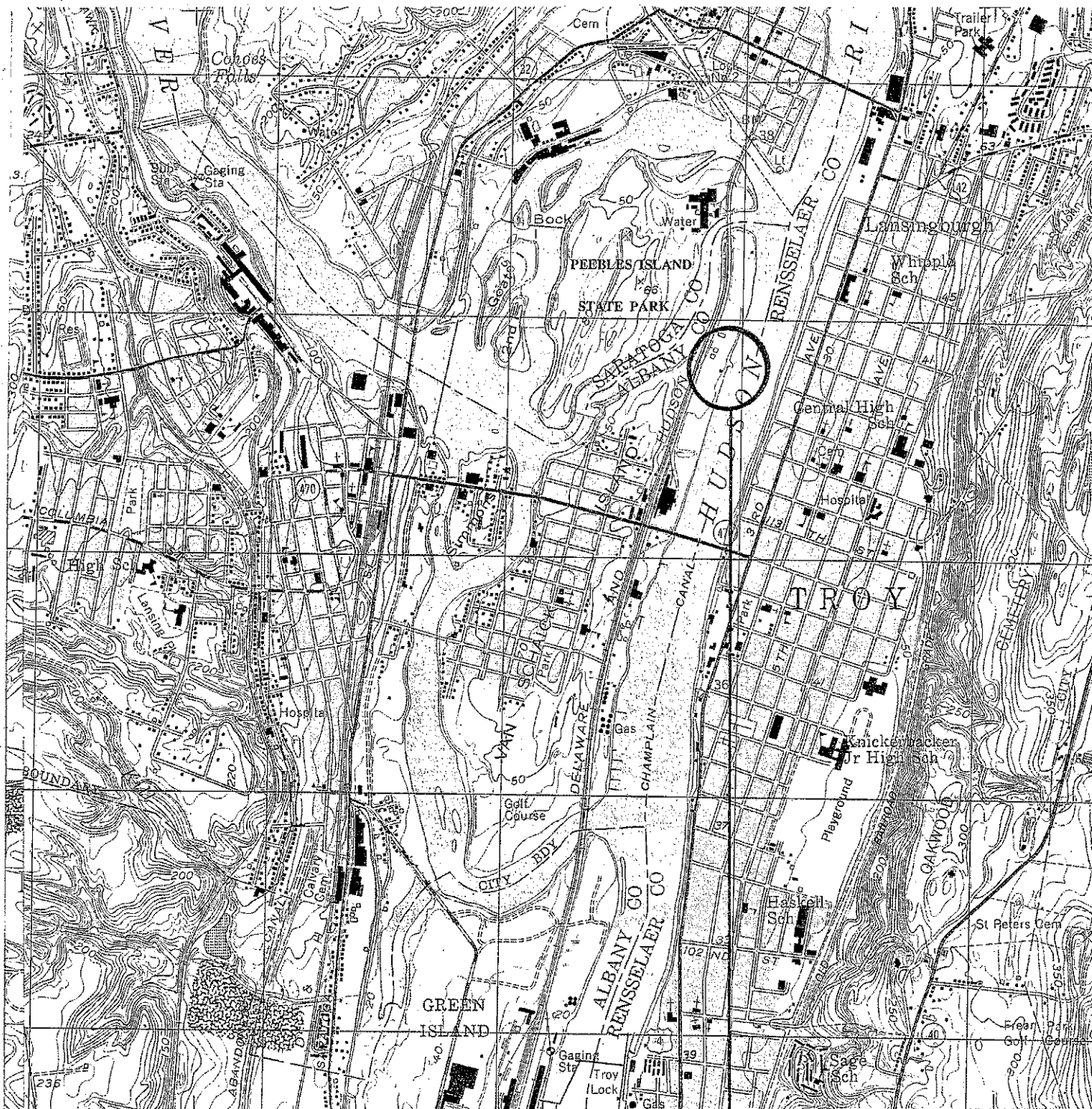
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Matton Shipyard, Cohoes
Albany County, New York

Photo Log (Prints from Digital Photos)

Name of Property: Matton Shipyard
Location: Albany County, New York
Photographer: Mark Peckham
Date: March 2008
Location of Negatives: CD-R Included
NY_AlbCo_Matship

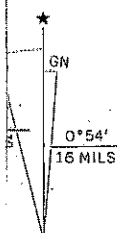
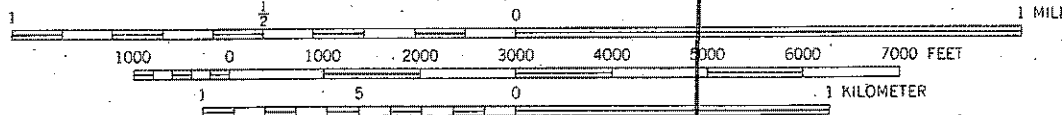
Reference #	Caption
N-1	General View of shipyard showing Buildings #8, #5, & #6. View North.
S-1	Building #8. View South
W-1	Building #5 & flagpole. View West.
E-1	Building # 5 (foreground) & #1 (background) & flagpole. View East.
E-2	Building #1 Stores building and Office
E-3	Steel launchways and River. View East.



42°30' 06" WATERVLIET 1.3 MI.
ALBANY (STATE CAPITOL) 8.2 MI.

(TROY SOUTH) 6259 11 NW
TROY (COURTHOUSE) 1.6 MI.
11 MI. TO U.S. 9 & 20

SCALE 1:24 000



1980 MAGNETIC NORTH
AT CENTER OF SHEET

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

→ Matton Shipyard
UTM Reference:

18607934 4737115 QUA

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092

A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Co Raes, Albany Co., NY
Troy North Quad