

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 94000337 Date Listed: 04/19/94

Essex Freight Station
Property Name

Middlesex
County

CT
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

for B. A. Savage
Signature of the Keeper

4/19/94
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

8. Statement of Significance: Area(s) and Criteria

Criterion A applies to the documented significance of the property under the area of Transportation.

This information has been confirmed with John Herzan, National Register Coordinator, CTSHPO, by telephone.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without attachment)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

MAR 9 1994

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and 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 from 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 Essex Freight Station

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 1 Railroad Avenue not for publication

city or town Essex (Centerbrook) vicinity

state Connecticut code CT county Middlesex code 007 zip code 06409

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby 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.)

John W. Shannahan 03/09/94
 Signature of certifying official Title Date
 John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission
 State of 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 the property is:

- 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): _____

Burt L. Savage 4/19/94
 Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Essex Freight Station
Name of Property

Middlesex, Connecticut
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 4 | 1 | buildings |
| | | sites |
| | | structures |
| 4 | 0 | objects |
| 8 | 1 | Total |

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/train depot

TRANSPORTATION/train depot

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

foundation Concrete

walls Weatherboard

roof Asphalt shingle

other _____

Narrative Description

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

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Essex Freight Station, Middlesex County, Connecticut

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The Essex Freight Station is located on the railroad right-of-way west of State Route 9 in the village of Centerbrook, which is part of the Town of Essex. (The center of the Town of Essex is located to the northeast on the opposite side of Route 9.) The station yard is bounded on the north by the Middlesex Turnpike (State Route 154) and Plains Road on the south.

The freight station is a wood-frame building constructed about 1915 by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad (Photograph #s 1, 2, 3, 4). Other structures on the property include three small contributing wooden outbuildings, built between 1900 and 1915, and a large non-contributing modern metal warehouse built in 1979. Nearby structures and objects include railroad tracks, sidings, switches, and signals. (See Exhibit A for location and identification.) The switches, contributing objects that probably date from about 1900, are manually operated devices to change the position of the track. The signals, also contributing objects, are located on either side of the track at the south end of the yard and consist of round painted circles of metal set on metal standards. These also operate manually. Antique steam engines, passenger cars, and other rolling stock, all dating from the early twentieth century, are based here but are not included in this nomination. They are owned by the Connecticut Valley Railroad, which restored them to active service. Wood-frame factory buildings, dating from the late nineteenth century and devoted to the manufacture of witch hazel, are found to the east and northwest of the station yard, but they are not historically associated with the freight station.

Changes to the immediate area over time include the removal of a passenger station, which was nearly identical in appearance to the existing freight house. It was located immediately to the south of the present building and bordered the tracks.

The exterior appearance of the freight station has changed very little since it was built. Typical of its type and period, it is one-story in height and has a rectangular plan (25' x 81'). Its low gable roof has a wide overhang supported by slim wooden braces. The lower half of the walls is sheathed with a vertical board dado, and clapboarding is displayed on the upper half. The original sliding freight doors, with diagonal boarding, remain in place on the south, east, and west walls.

In 1970 the Connecticut Valley Railroad purchased the freight station and leased the station yard and the railroad right-of way. The building was renovated the following year for the railroad company offices and a gift shop. Interior wooden roof trusses and plank flooring remain in place in the shop at the south end of the building (Photograph #5). The original station agent's office near the center of the building on the west side remains relatively intact and now serves as a ticket office. The platform at the north end is new construction, added when this end was extended slightly to accommodate office space. A small addition on the east side for public restrooms is also part of this renovation. Although the offices now display beaded-edge wainscot and molded window and door frames with corner blocks that are typical of the period of construction, none of these finishes is original. The platform along the west (track side) of the building was rebuilt.

All the smaller historic buildings associated with the property have vertical board siding and, with the exception of the guard house at the south entrance to the property, have gabled roofs. The south guard house has a hip roof, still covered with its original asphalt shingles, but both of these buildings are the same size and

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identical in plan (approximately 4' x 5'). The slightly larger shed (approximately 6' x 12') is located on the west side of the tracks near Plains Road. Changes to these buildings have been limited to the replacement of some deteriorated siding. The company's modern warehouse alongside the tracks at the southeast end of the yard is a very long one-story building (30' x 180') entirely sheathed with metal siding.

| KEY | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|----|
| A | Freight Station (c. 1915) | C |
| B | Warehouse (1979) | NC |
| C | 2 Manual Switches (c. 1900) | C |
| D | 2 Guard Houses (c. 1915) | C |
| E | Line Signals (c. 1900) | C |
| F | Shed (c. 1900) | C |
| # | Photograph Views | |

**Bold Line is Boundary of
Nominated Property**

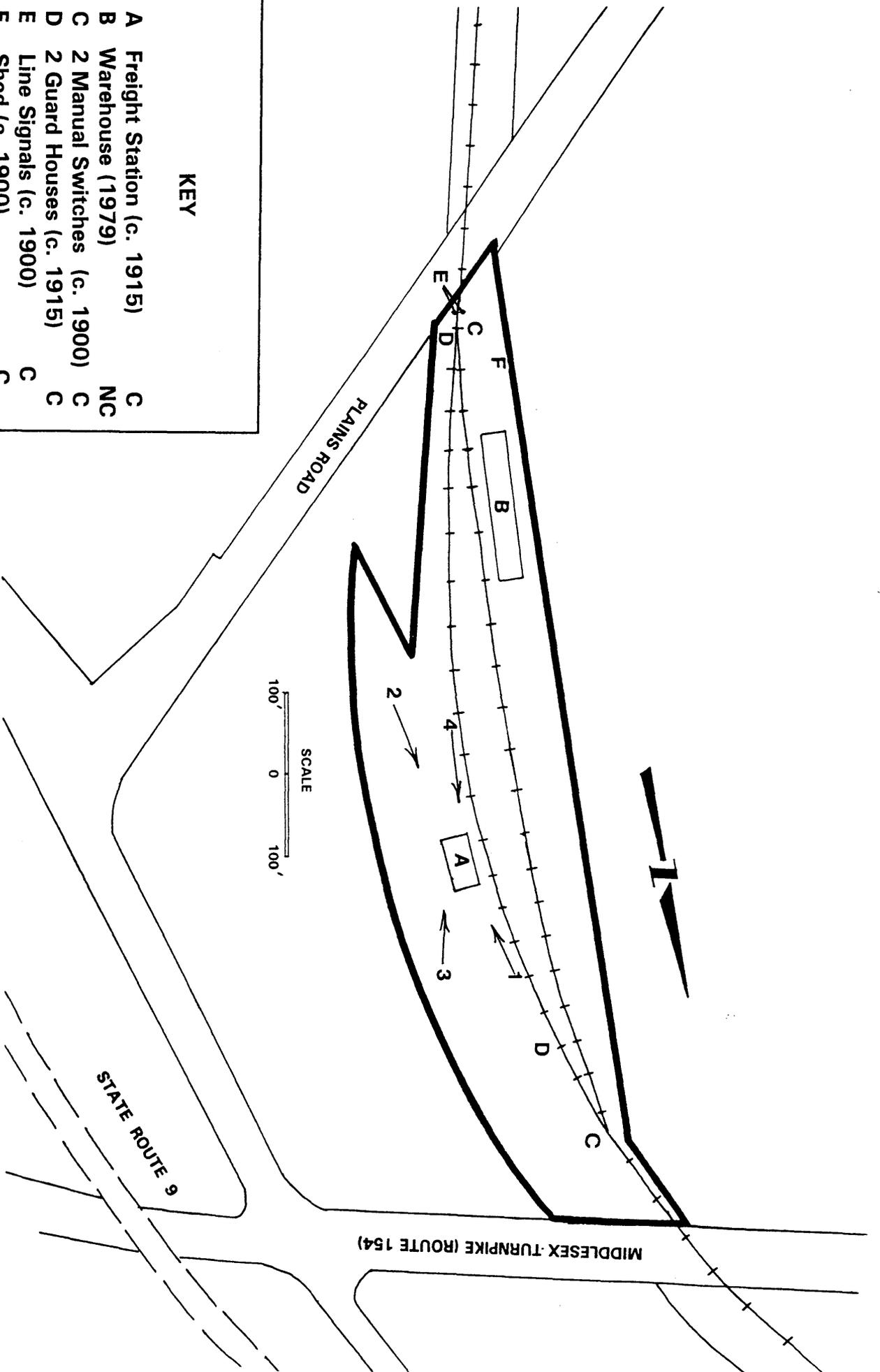


EXHIBIT A: SITE MAP - ESSEX FREIGHT STATION

Compiled by Cunningham Associates Ltd. 11/15/93
from Essex Tax Assessor's Map #s 33 and 45 and Aerial Surveys

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.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, 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)

ARCHITECTURE

TRANSPORTATION

Period of Significance

c. 1900 - 1943

c. 1900 - 1943

Significant Dates

c. 1915

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

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Essex Freight Station, Middlesex County, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 1

The well-preserved Essex Freight Station, a significant example of a once common type of railroad building, illustrates the final stage of historic rail service in Connecticut. When it was constructed in the early twentieth century, most of the independent nineteenth-century railroads in the state had become part of a giant railroad monopoly, controlled by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. The freight station has added significance because it is preserved in its original historic context and still associated with a functioning steam railroad line and a historic railyard and right-of-way.

Architectural Significance

Because it has retained its distinctive form and materials, the Essex Freight Station is a representative example of the type of building used for both passenger and freight service in the Northeast in the early twentieth century. Quite similar to an extant freight station built at Deep River (the next station on this line to the north) about the same time, it is primarily a straightforward functional structure, devoid of stylistic detail. Recent changes to the building have been minimal and have not obscured its characteristic exterior. The renovation carefully preserved the original cladding, the functionally defined fenestration, and the original loading doors. The c. 1900 framing methods and plain interior finishes are still readily visible in the large space given over to the present gift shop.

Historical Background

Although the Essex Freight Station was constructed by the Valley Division of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad, this branch line was originally chartered in 1872 as the Connecticut Valley Railroad. One of the last independent lines to be built in the state, it ran from Saybrook Point to Hartford. It was absorbed by the New York, New Haven, and Hartford in 1887, part of a massive takeover of rail service by this conglomerate, then under the management of New York financiers J.P. Morgan, William Rockefeller, and Charles Mellon. Operating in an era in which there was little government regulation, these railroad barons established a monopoly which controlled 90 percent of New England's rail service by 1890. When the federal government began to require railroads to improve safety conditions and upgrade their facilities, new passenger and freight stations, like this example, were built along the Valley line. Although eventually a federal crusade to destroy railroad monopolies was successful, in its wake, poor fiscal management and over-regulation, combined with the advent of the automobile era, ended rail service on most of the branch lines in the state.

The Connecticut Valley Railroad was one of the last nineteenth-century railroad lines to be built in the state. Railroading in Connecticut began in 1830s, when rail lines were constructed along the coast, and by 1870 most cities and towns in the state had access to rail service. The first company chartered to build this line from Hartford to Saybrook foundered in 1852 due to lack of funding. It was not until 1868 that the project was revived under the leadership of James C. Walkley, the president of Charter Oak Life Insurance Company in Hartford. Constructed to compete with steamboat service on the Connecticut River by providing faster overland service from Hartford to Long Island Sound, the route was laid out along the west side of the Connecticut River by survey crews in 1869. Construction began in 1870 and was completed to Saybrook Point

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the following year, where connections could be made with the regular steamboat service to New York. Regular service on the Connecticut Valley line started in July 1871 with four passenger trains and one mixed train daily, making 15 stops along the way. In 1872 an additional half mile of track, mostly laid on trestles over water, extended the line from Saybrook Point to the village of Fenwick, a newly fashionable summer resort. Fenwick Hall, a new resort hotel, had opened there in 1871. In addition, Fenwick was the location of the Hartford Yacht Club. Regular service took 2 1/2 hours from Hartford to Fenwick; presumably the travel time was considerably shorter for the special excursion trains for beachgoers, since they made fewer stops.

The company became overextended when it leased lines north of Hartford from the Connecticut Central and the Springfield and New London railroads and went into receivership after defaulting on its second mortgage bonds. It was taken over in 1880 by the Hartford and Connecticut Railroad, a new company apparently founded with the express purpose of eventually selling the line. The New York, Hartford, and New Haven Railroad obtained a 99-year lease and assumed control. When forced to comply with new federal regulations, especially the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad began to invest in more modern equipment and better track. By 1920 the company also built many new station houses along the Valley line, including the existing freight house here and at the Deep River station. Despite these improvements, the line was not very profitable. Freight hauling was limited due to a lack of industry in the lower Connecticut Valley, and when automobiles came into common use, there was less demand for passenger service. The company had to retrench: all service to Fenwick over the South Cove trestle ended in 1916 and by 1933 passenger service on the rest of the line was eliminated. Rail freight service continued, but eventually it could no longer compete with the trucking industry; the Valley line was abandoned below Middletown shortly after the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad went bankrupt in 1961.

There were several groups of railroad *aficionados* in Connecticut at that time; all of them owned old steampowered rolling stock. Although a few ran special trains from time to time on operating commercial lines, all of these groups dreamed of owning a railroad. After inspecting several defunct branch lines in the state, these groups formed the Connecticut Valley Railroad Association in order to take over the abandoned Valley line, then owned by Penn Central, for a tourist railroad. As planned, the Connecticut Park and Forest Department, now the Department of Environmental Protection, with the goal of controlling commercial development along this scenic right-of-way next to the Connecticut River, took title to the line in 1969 and leased it to the Connecticut Valley Railroad in 1970. The new railroad was authorized to operate passenger and freight service from Old Saybrook to Marmos, just south of Middletown, a distance of about 28 miles. The antique rolling stock was brought to Essex and put in operating condition, but thousands of volunteer hours were needed to restore some of the badly deteriorated track and the freight station before the first tourist steam train made its maiden run on July 29, 1971, the centennial anniversary of the line. Initially only three miles of track were restored, extending from Essex to Deep River, where connection can be made with riverboats run by the Deep River Navigation Company. By 1983 the line was extended to Chester, a total distance of 5 1/2 miles, and now the track is clear as far north as Haddam, 11 miles from Essex. Today 140,000 tourists ride the Valley Railroad excursion trains each year.

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9. Major Bibliographic References

Chapman, James (General Manager, Connecticut Valley Railroad). Interview,
November 17, 1993.

"Connecticut Valley Railroad Roundhouse and Turntable Site." National Register
nomination, June 30, 1993.

Deep River Bicentennial Committee. A Bicentennial Journal. n.p., n.d.

Nelligan, Tom. The Valley Railroad Story: The Connecticut Valley Line. New
York: Quadrant Press, 1983.

Riley, James (Former General Manager, Connecticut Valley Railroad). Interview,
June 16, 1993.

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property includes the freight station and the immediately adjacent
railyard as delineated on the attached map drawn from Essex Tax Assessor's Map #s
33 and 45.

Boundary Justification:

Because the entire railroad property is quite extensive and includes 28 miles of
right-of-way, the boundaries of the nominated property are limited to just the
building and its immediate historic surroundings. No historic buildings or
structures associated with the railyard were eliminated in establishing the
boundaries as follows: The north and south boundaries are the existing roads
which cross the historic right-of-way. The east and west boundaries are the
property lines of railyard.

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List of Photographs

Note: All photographs were taken by Cunningham Associates Ltd., 6/93, and the negatives are on file with the Connecticut Historical Commission.

- | | | |
|----|---|------------|
| 1. | View: General view of building and site | Facing: SE |
| 2. | View: South and west elevations | Facing: NE |
| 3. | View: East and north elevations | Facing: SW |
| 4. | View: South and east elevations | Facing: NW |
| 5. | View: Interior - south end | Facing: S |