

**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 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 CENTRAL VERMONT RAILROAD PIER

other names/site number N/A

**2. Location**

street & number State Pier Road  not for publication

city or town New London  vicinity

state Connecticut code CT county New London code 011 zip code 06320

**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.)

Jennifer Aniskovich EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 12/14/04  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
Jennifer Aniskovich, Executive Director, CT Commission on Culture and Tourism

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 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson M. Beall Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 1/26/05

Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
Name of Property

New London County, CT  
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	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	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)

TRANSPORTATION: water-related  
TRANSPORTATION: rail-related

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

NOT IN USE

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: earth-filled masonry pier

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A  
walls Granite  
roof N/A  
other N/A

**Narrative Description**

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

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark an "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, structure
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION  
ENGINEERING

**Period of Significance**

1876-1946

**Significant Dates**

1876

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

N/A

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**9. Major Bibliographic 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 Building Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository:

State Historic Preservation Office,  
59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, CT 06106

Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
Name of Property

New London County, CT  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 8.36 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	19	743220	4582380	3		
		Zone Easting	Northing		Zone Easting	Northing
2				4		
					<input type="checkbox"/>	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 Bruce Clouette, Historian  
organization Archaeological and Historical Services, Inc. date December 3, 2004  
street & number P.O. Box 543 telephone 860-429-1723  
city or town Storrs state CT zip code 06268

### 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 SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

### Property Owner

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

name Connecticut Department of Transportation  
street & number 2800 Berlin Turnpike telephone 860-594-3000  
city or town Newington state CT zip code 06131-7546

**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

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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

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### Description:

The Central Vermont Railroad Pier (Photographs 1 and 2, Figure 4) is an 1,100-foot-long earth-filled granite masonry structure that was completed in 1876. It lies just west of the Connecticut State Pier on the west bank of the Thames River, which is tidal at this point and forms part of New London Harbor. The general area was formerly one of warehouses and railroad yard tracks but today is mostly open and used for outdoor lumber storage. The pier property includes an onshore portion that is 850 feet wide and varies in depth from about 100 to 300 feet. Formerly, a frame office building from 1937 and a modern cylindrical storage tank stood on the land portion of the property, but these have been demolished. To the north of the property are Amtrak's electrified Northeast Corridor rail line and, beyond that, the high-level Gold Star Bridge carrying Interstate 95.

The pier is 150 feet wide for most of its length; the final 250 feet, however, is 220 feet wide, giving the pier a hammer-head shape. Currently the pier's surface is covered with asphalt (Photograph 3), with the paving flush with the tops of the masonry perimeter walls. Along the length of the pier's west wall and the head wall of the west slip is a shelf that appears to have accommodated a timber fender of some sort, held in place by iron rods pinned into the masonry, only a few of which survive (Photographs 4 and 5). The walls themselves consist of a coursed ashlar of roughly shaped gray granite blocks typically about 18 inches thick and 4 feet in length, finished with flat capstones joined with iron staples. The walls rise about four feet above the high water mark, but because the tides in New London rise and fall an average of 2 ½ feet, the exposure of the walls constantly varies. The portion below the high water mark is dark colored and partly covered with algae (Photograph 6). The east side of the pier is similar, but because of greater deterioration the masonry is less well defined (Photograph 7). Wooden pilings form a protective barrier along part of the east side. Although the substructure is not visible, it can be assumed from contemporary construction practice that the stone perimeter walls become thicker toward the bottom, continue well below the level of the harbor bed (which was 22 feet below high water at one point), and rest on a dense grid of timber piles. There appears to be some minor subsidence of portions of the west wall.

Objects on the pier are currently limited to three types of mooring appliances, all of which are set within concrete footings (Photographs 8 and 9). In the period of significance, several parallel railroad tracks extended the length of the pier, of which only a remnant at the extreme northeast corner of the property remains visible (Photograph 10). The arrangement of buildings and structures atop the pier changed with the various purposes it has served. When it was built, it had coal-loading equipment and storage bunkers to service a fleet of Reading Railroad coastal freighters that off-loaded coal for New England markets. In 1904 the Central Vermont Railroad decided to use the pier for another purpose, transporting freight and express between New York City and the communities along its inland New England route. To that end, a large freight shed was built along the east side of the pier, with the coal hoist remaining on the west side for some time. Over the years additional buildings

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**Central Vermont Railroad Pier**  
**New London, New London County, CT**

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appeared, including an office and a tool house. After freight transfer ended in 1946, the pier was mostly used as storage tracks for freight cars, and most of the buildings were taken down around 1970. At one time, only the administrative office building, a two-story frame building built in 1937, remained standing, but it too has now been demolished.

The slips on either side of the pier originally had a depth of 16 feet, increased by additional dredging to 21 feet in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 3). When it was in operation, the pier was connected to the New London waterfront by a 20-foot channel and to the middle of the Thames River by a 35-foot channel (depths as of June 30, 1921) that also served the adjacent State Pier. Because of natural forces such as siltation the depth has changed over time.

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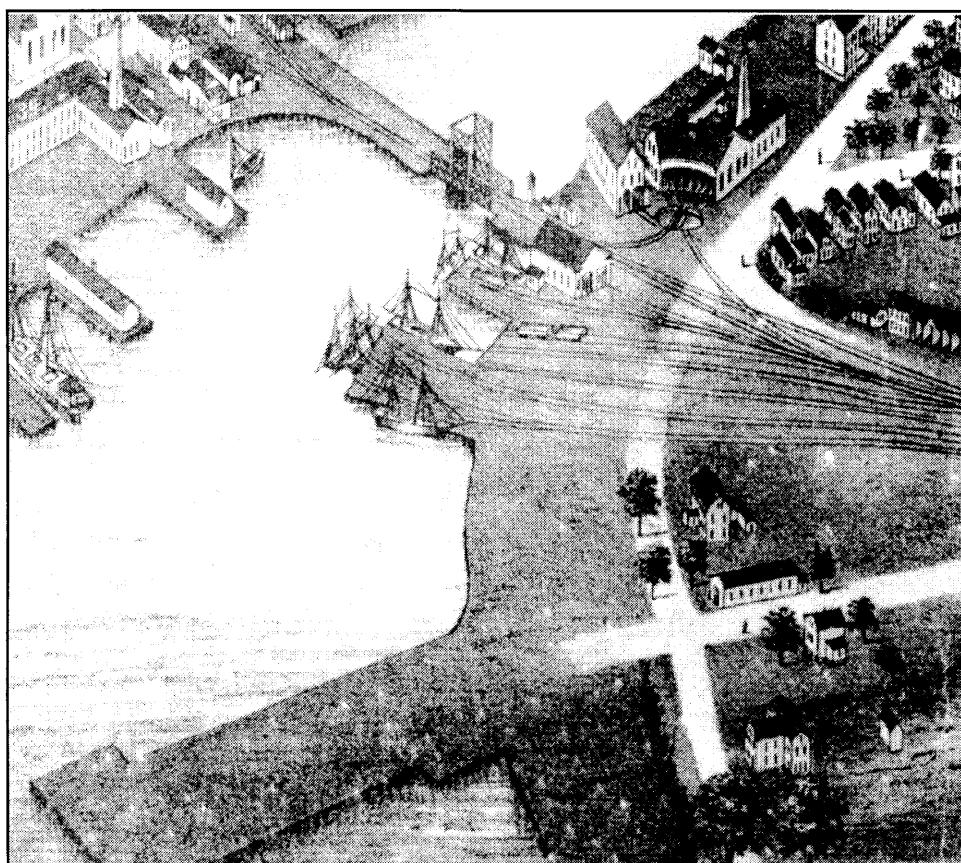
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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

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**Figure 1: Engraving of the pier (lower left) shortly after completion in 1876, before any buildings, tracks, or structures were added (*New London, Connecticut, 1876*). The railroad's earlier wharves are visible in the upper center of the view, as is the rail line and drawbridge leading to New London's commercial center.**



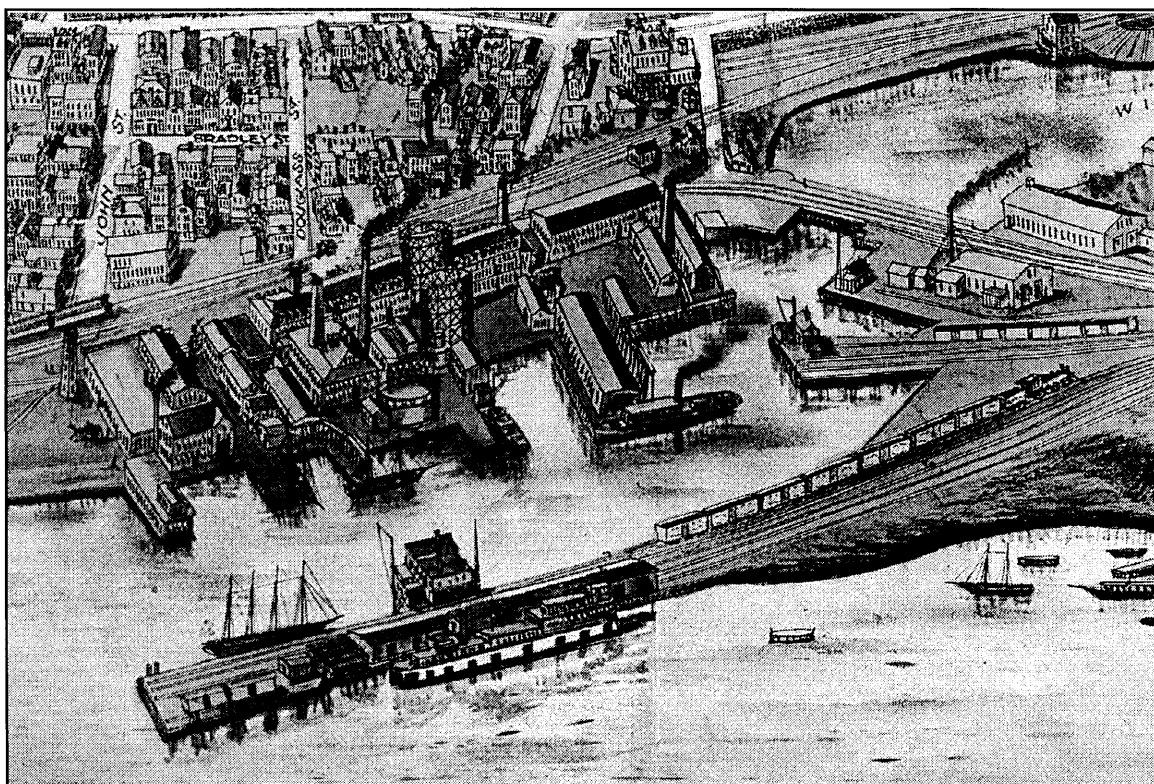
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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

**Figure 2: Engraving of the pier in 1911, showing one of the railroad's freighters alongside. The buildings include a freight house on the east side and a coal elevator on the west side (*Aero View of New London*). One of the earlier small wharves is still in use.**





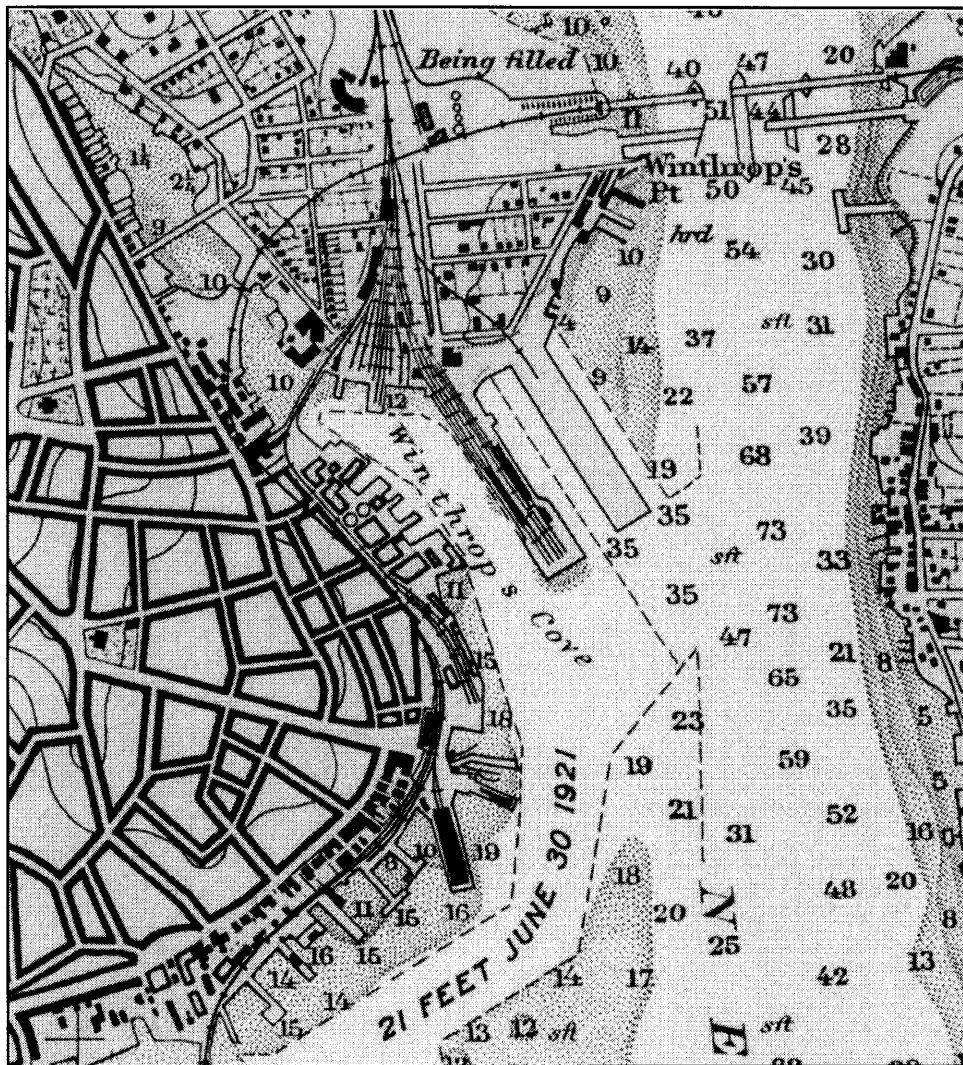
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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

Figure 3: U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey chart of New London Harbor, 1929.



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**Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT**

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**Figure 4: Aerial view of pier (left, with Connecticut State Pier on right), 1995. The tank and the administration building onshore are no longer standing (Connecticut D.E.P).**



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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

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### Statement of Significance:

#### Summary

The Central Vermont Railroad Pier in New London, Connecticut, is a significant resource because it illustrates the important role that rail-water interchange played in the state's 19<sup>th</sup>-century transportation history (National Register Criterion A). At one time, virtually every Connecticut railroad had some connection with coastal freight and passenger navigation. Before an all-rail route was completed between Boston and New York, passengers could choose to complete their journey via steamship from Fall River, Providence, Stonington, Groton, New London, or Old Saybrook. Coal for Connecticut's industries was brought in by water and transferred to railroad cars well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even the inland routes interchanged freight and passengers with steamship service on the Thames and Connecticut rivers. This large pier was built by the Central Vermont Railroad as a means of bringing in first coal and then general freight and express shipments and was active from 1876 to 1946. The Central Vermont Railroad ran from New London through eastern Connecticut to Palmer, Massachusetts, a major railroad junction, and then continued onward to Vermont and Canada.

The pier also has significance in engineering history as a large and relatively intact example of 19<sup>th</sup>-century harbor-facilities engineering (Criterion C). The form and method of construction reveal much about the period: the pier's large size significantly exceeded the length of facilities built for coastal sailing vessels and clearly was intended to address the needs of larger steam-powered freighters. The method of construction—earth-filled masonry perimeter walls—was also a product of the age of steam; although there exists little in the documentary record describing the process of this pier's construction, it is apparent that without steam-powered pile drivers, pumps, and earth-moving equipment, a pier on this scale would have been beyond the means of a small railroad company. Although no formal survey has been made of this type of resource, it can be said with confidence that this is the only large 19<sup>th</sup>-century pier remaining in Connecticut. Other comparable examples, such as Belle Dock and the New Haven Railroad piers in New Haven, are known to have been destroyed or embedded in later harbor improvements.

Although not primarily being nominated for its information potential (Criterion D), the pier as an artifact could prove illuminating about some aspects of 19<sup>th</sup>-century civil-engineering practice. For example, it would be interesting to know how the depth and density of pilings compare with modern standards, which might become apparent if repairs are made to the east wall, and one could determine through laboratory testing the source of the granite.

The fact that none of the historic buildings and structures that once stood on the pier remain does not constitute a serious issue of integrity. The pier itself is the core of the resource and, when placed in operation, accounted for nearly 80% of the cost of construction. The various appurtenances changed over time as the pier's use changed, but the masonry and fill itself remained constant.

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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

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### Historical Background

New London was a prosperous seaport in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but its leaders fretted that railroad construction would pass the place by, turning New London into a backwater. New London merchants and civic leaders were therefore active proponents of the New London, Willimantic, and Springfield Railroad, chartered in 1847 and completed, not to Springfield, Massachusetts, but instead to Palmer, some fifteen miles to the east. In 1852 a drawbridge was built across Winthrop Cove so the line could connect with the downtown area of New London, where it joined up both with the just-opened rail line from New London to New Haven and with steamboat service to New York City.

In 1861, a new corporation, the New London Northern Railroad, took over the New London, Willimantic, and Palmer Railroad (as it had been re-named). The New London Northern undertook a program of improvements on the line, including repairing and enlarging its New London wharf facilities; for a time it operated its own steamboats to New York. Equally important, it extended the line from Palmer to Miller's Falls, Massachusetts, where it connected with rail lines serving Vermont and, ultimately, Canada. Although it survived as a corporate entity until 1951, the New London Northern effectively lost its separate identity starting in 1871, when it became a leased property of the Central Vermont Railroad. The Central Vermont itself soon came under the control of Canada's Grand Trunk Railway, thereby establishing New London as a major terminal for shipping to and from Canada. In 1922 the Grand Trunk and Central Vermont were reorganized as subsidiaries of the Canadian National Railway.

The wharves that had been built by its predecessors were too small for the role serving all of inland New England and Canada envisioned by the Central Vermont Railroad (though those wharves remained in service well after the current pier was built - see Figure 1). In 1874 the railroad began construction on a facility of exceptional size, one that could accommodate ocean-going vessels more than 500 feet in length. The wharf cost a total of \$225,000, an impressive sum at that time, of which \$45,000 was for coal-handling facilities and \$175,000 for the pier itself. The coal facilities, finished in 1877, included a steam-powered hoist that could unload more than 100 tons of coal an hour from the Reading Railroad freighters in the slips into the Central Vermont's rail cars and coal bunkers. Because of this investment, the railroad was one of few Connecticut lines that showed a profit in 1878. Operation of the pier was aided over the years by channel dredging projects undertaken in New London Harbor by the U.S. Government, though the railroad itself was responsible for keeping the slips to their proper depth.

In 1904 the railroad reconfigured the pier to serve a new role, freight and express service to New York City. Two steamers, *New London* and *New York*, were purchased, covered platforms were built over the tracks along the pier, and a large freight house was erected on the pier's east side (Figure 3). The two freighters, later joined by a third vessel, *Vermont*, were 268 feet in length and had a cargo capacity of 1,900 tons; they were operated by a subsidiary, the Central Vermont Transportation

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**Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT**

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Company. Freight headed to New York City or for export through New York harbor was carried by rail to New London, where it was loaded onto one of the company's freighters for an overnight trip to New York's Pier 29. The freighter would then pick up a return cargo bound for New England or Canada. Some cargos, such as fruit, coffee beans, sisal, hides, hemp sugar, tapioca, and crude rubber bypassed the pier and instead were transferred via lighters to and from ocean-going ships waiting in New York Harbor. The railroad's southern division became popularly known as the "Banana Belt."

One of the more interesting aspects of the Central Vermont's New London pier operation was the express service that was offered between New York and the larger towns in the railroad's service area. Special baggage cars marked "New York Fast Freight - Over Night Service" ran in the railroad's passenger trains and sometimes outnumbered coaches. Small shipments could be brought to certain stations along the route, where they would be loaded into the baggage cars, carried to New London, transferred to a freighter, and brought overnight to New York. The route also worked in reverse, allowing rapid delivery from the metropolis to eastern Connecticut, central Massachusetts, and Vermont.

After World War II, a brief economic slump, competition from truck traffic, and the aging of the railroad's freighter fleet combined to make operation of the pier uneconomical. Service was suspended in November 1946 during a strike of New London's dock workers and never resumed. The vessels were tied up at the pier until they were sold for scrap in 1948. Thereafter, the railroad used the pier only for railroad-car storage tracks and as an administrative center for its southern operations. The railroad retained the pier after the line itself was sold to the Connecticut Central Railroad. It was sold to the State of Connecticut in 2001; long-term planning for the facility is still under way.

**Engineering Significance**

Pier engineering is straightforward in principle but demanding in the details. Massive masonry retaining walls, the height and width of which we today see only a small portion, define the shape of the pier and contain the earth fill that provides the pier's surface. The walls had to be designed so as to resist the outward pressure of the fill, the erosive action of the sea, and damage from the inevitable collisions. Also critical were the piles driven into the harbor bed and cut off to form a level surface on which to place the masonry. The piles had to be of sufficient depth to reach densely compacted sediment or rock, and they had to be spaced properly so as to bear the load of the walls. On either side of the pier, slips had to be dredged to a consistent depth as close to the walls as was practical.

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**Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT**

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Until it was joined by the adjacent Connecticut State Pier (1914), the Central Vermont Railroad Pier was by far the largest pier in New London harbor and ranks among the largest ever constructed in Connecticut. New Haven had several large piers, including its celebrated Long Wharf, Belle Dock, and the railroad piers operated by the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad Company, but harbor improvements have destroyed or buried these structures. The smaller steamship docks built by the railroads in Connecticut's smaller harbors have also disappeared. The Central Vermont Railroad Pier can therefore be considered not only a typical example of 19<sup>th</sup>-century rivers and harbors engineering but also as an increasingly rare survivor of the type.

Piers of this type do not require industrial methods, but they become far more feasible in the industrial age. The creation of the huge granite blocks, for example, almost presupposes steam-powered drills and hoists in the quarry. Similarly, pile-driving, the lifting and positioning of the blocks, and the pumping of water from the work area all become more practicable with steam power, and the delivery and dumping of fill could be accomplished more readily with railroad cars than just about any other method. Dredging was another steam-powered operation that was essential to create the deep slips and channels required to accommodate the larger vessels of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Information Potential**

The greatest challenge for any engineering work in New London harbor was the creation of stable foundations: the bedrock that is exposed on the point just north of the railroad pier drops off very sharply, so that it can be reached only after going through 70 feet or more of sedimentation on the harbor floor. For example, the predecessor to the current railroad bridge just north of the pier, constructed in the 1880s, began subsiding almost immediately because of inadequate footings. The pier seems to have fared better. It would be interesting to know how deep and how close together the pilings were placed. Also, what is the cause of the minor subsidence along the west side (the east side damage is from collision)? Pile decay, deterioration in the wall itself, or some other cause?

It would also be informative to know the source of the granite that was used in the pier. The railroad had access to a large granite quarry on its line in Munson, Massachusetts, but there were much closer sources of superficially similar gray granite on the coast, including quarries in Groton and Waterford, Connecticut, and Westerly, Rhode Island. Which was more advantageous for the railroad, carrying it some distance on its own line, or paying for it to be shipped a shorter distance by water?

These are questions that could be answered from a scientific analysis of the pier itself.

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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

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### Bibliography:

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Beers, F. W. *Atlas of New London County, Connecticut, From Actual Surveys*. New York: F. W. Beers, A. D. Ellis & G. G. Soule, 1868.

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**Central Vermont Railroad Pier**  
**New London, New London County, CT**

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U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. Charts of New London Harbor, 1889 - present.

U.S. Engineer, Office of. "New London Harbor, Connecticut, Condition of Improvement, June 30th, 1885, to Accompany Annual Report." House Executive Document No. 1, part 2, 49th Congress, 1st Session, 1885 (Serial Set No. 2370, p. 642.). Map showing dredging program.



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

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### Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property is recorded in the New London Assessor records as Map G10, Block 245, Lot 3. It is described in a deed to the State of Connecticut dated May 15, 2001 and recorded in the New London Land Records, Volume 1201, page 267.

### Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the entire pier structure and the immediately adjacent portion of the shore that was railroad property.

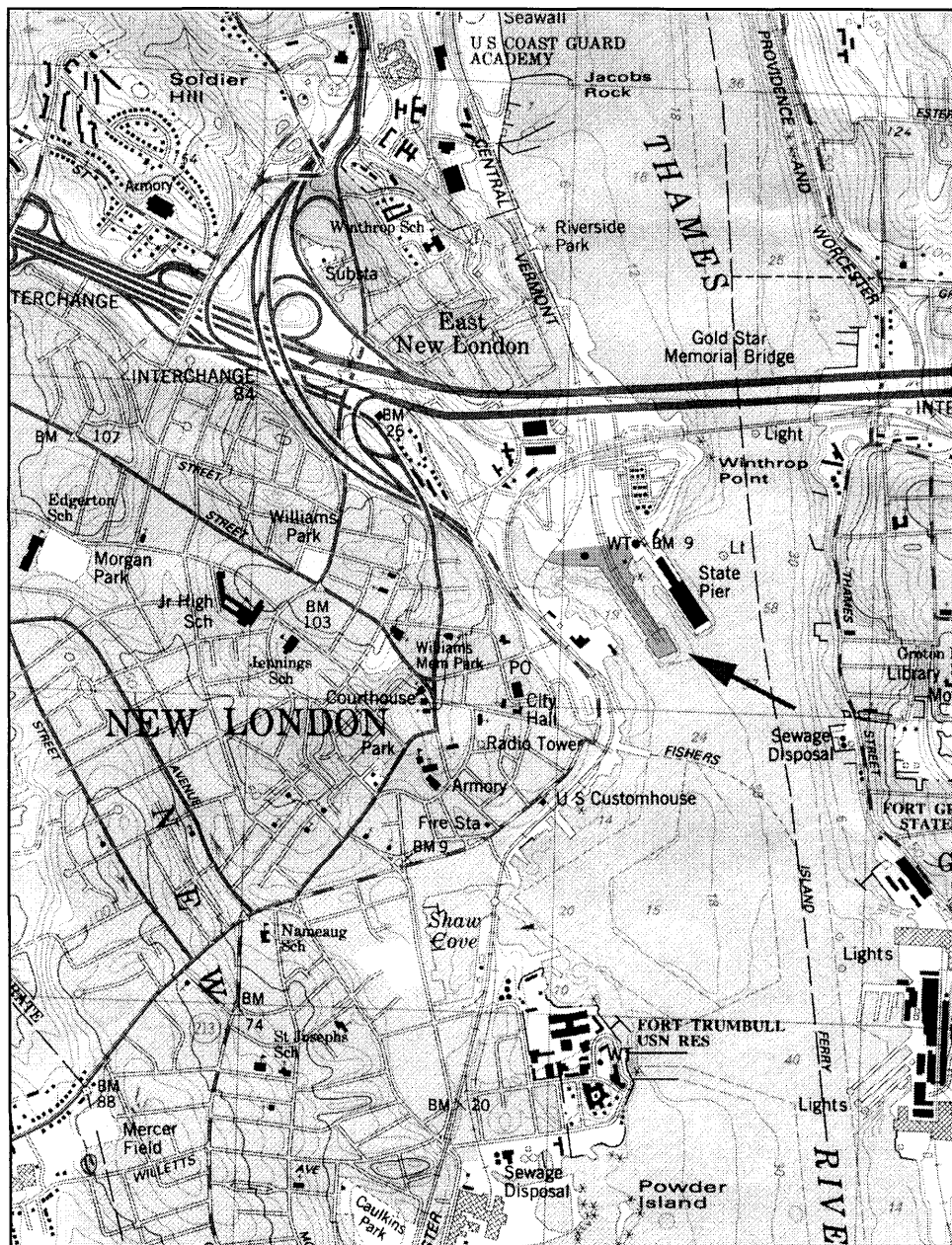
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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

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Location of pier plotted on USGS New London Quadrangle, 7.5-Minute Series, scale 1:24000 (one inch = 2000 feet):



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**Central Vermont Railroad Pier**  
**New London, New London County, CT**

Section number Photographs Page 1

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**All Photographs:**

1. Central Vermont Railroad Pier
2. New London, New London County, CT
3. AHS, Inc. Photo
4. October 2003
5. Negative filed with AHS, Inc.

**Captions:**

- 1: Overview of pier from land, showing west side, camera facing southeast.
- 2: Overview of pier from the water, camera facing northeast.
- 3: View of paved surface of pier, camera facing southeast.
- 4: Detail of masonry, west side, showing shelf along the wall that probably accommodated a timber fender structure; camera facing southeast.
- 5: Detail of masonry, head of west slip, showing iron rods that probably supported a timber component; camera facing east.
- 6: Close-up of masonry from the water, west side, camera facing northeast.
- 7: Detail of deteriorated masonry on east side of pier, camera facing northwest.
- 8: Detail of typical mooring cleat, west side of pier, camera facing east.
- 9: Detail of one type of bollard, east side of pier, camera facing east.
- 10: Remnant of railroad tracks visible at the northeast corner of the property, camera facing north.