

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: 96000079

Date Listed: 2/28/96

Bivalve Oyster Packing Houses and Docks Cumberland NJ
Property Name: County: State:

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 Patrick Andrews
Signature of the Keeper

2/28/96
Date of Action

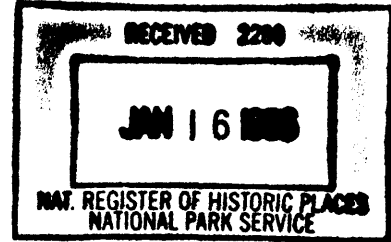
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Amended Items in Nomination:

This SLR makes a minor correction to the defined Period of Significance. The Statement of Significance says that the oyster boom was tied to the arrival of the railroad in 1872. The Period of Significance defined in the nomination starts in 1870, but there appears no justification for this earlier date. The form is amended to begin the Period of Significance in 1872.

DISTRIBUTION:

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

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 Bivalve Oyster Packing Houses & Docks
other names/site number Bivalve Packing Company

2. Location

street & number Shell Road & rear Miller & Howard Streets not for publication
city or town (Bivalve) Commercial Township vicinity
state New Jersey code NJ county Cumberland code 011 zip code 08349

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.)
[Signature] Date 12/11/95
Signature of certifying official/Title
Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources/DSHPO
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:) _____
Signature of the Keeper Patrick Andrews Date of Action 2/28/96

Name of Property
BSS 031030

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	
5	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
5	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
 Historic Marine & Architectural Resources
 of the Maurice River Cove MPS

**Number of contributing resources previously listed
 in the National Register**
 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE
 (processing)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/ water related
 INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/
 industrial storage
 DOMESTIC/ single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

No style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation wood
 walls wood
 roof asphalt shingle
 other later siding: asphalt
 shingle, asbestos shingle

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 "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 N/A
(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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce
Maritime History

Period of Significance

1870 - 1945

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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): N/A

- 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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Bivalve Packing Houses
Name of Property

Cumberland County, NJ
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 1.5

Port Norris, NJ Quad

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	18	4	9	7	2	2	0	4	3	4	2	4	6	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

3

Zone	Easting				Northing									

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 George E. Thomas, Ph. D

organization George E. Thomas Associates date 14 June 1994

street & number 223 East Evergreen Avenue telephone (215) 247-6787

city or town Philadelphia state PA zip code 19118-2822

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
Cumberland County, New Jersey

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Shellpile's Bivalve Packing Company oyster packing houses and docks are a group of wood frame buildings bordering a considerable portion of the waterfront of Shellpile, New Jersey. Shellpile and Bivalve were the names given the industrial suburbs of Port Norris which developed in the 1870s with the arrival of the Bridgeton and Port Norris Railroad. Though the surviving buildings represent only a portion of the original complex of buildings, railroad tracks, and platforms that existed at the height of the oystering industry, and though they have been continuously built over to the point that it is difficult to establish the age of any element, these structures still have the essential elements of their construction -- the range of buildings and docks along the waterfront.

The complex consists of five surviving separate structures that line the Maurice River waterfront: (1) a two-story sail loft at the west end with a gabled roofed main volume and a one-story shed addition on the land side (Photos 1 and 2); (2) two smaller gable roofed buildings on the shore; (3) the principal building, a long, two-story, gable-roofed packing house broken into several units and fronted by a covered dock on the water side (Photo 3); (4) a short two-story packing house of similar gable-roofed form and (5) a further low, two-story, gable-roofed packing house at the north end (Photo 8). Each of these structures was constructed adjacent to docks along the water front and fronted on rail tracks that have since been removed. Most have docks that extend perpendicular to the shoreline, reaching out over the shallow water to the channel.

In the case of the principal building, the wharves themselves were covered by sloping shed roofs that protected the dock hands from the elements (Photos 6,7). From the waterfront, it is the dock structure that dominates the appearance of the complex. From the shore, it is the two-story packing and shucking houses that now form the principal frontage of the buildings. The shore side, now called Shell Road, is fronted by a broad wood platform that provided the link to the railroad that passed through the center of the site.

Because of the harsh marine climate, the buildings have been extensively altered. Most have been covered and re-covered with various forms of siding. The westernmost building, for example, is covered with asphalt shingle. The principal building has been similarly resurfaced -- but shows evidence of earlier alterations as well. Portions of the principal building have been uncovered to the original vertical board and batten construction while on the water side, the exterior wall appears to have been recovered with tongue and

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Section 7 Page 2

Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
Cumberland County, New Jersey

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groove planking. In recent years, aluminum "clapboard" has become the material of choice for protection of the structures as has occurred on the western portion of the principal building. These variations, far from destroying historic integrity, enhance the sense of picturesque decay that typifies water-front buildings from Florida to Maine. Windows are similarly varied; most appear to have been single sash operated as casements or as awnings depending on where they were hinged. These are placed for interior illumination and not for exterior symmetry, reflecting the work-driven design.

Given the vernacular character of the construction, and lacking property atlases for the region, it is difficult to be certain about the sequence of the buildings. However, the construction and the appearance of the longest building of the group suggests that it was the first to be built in the present group. The principal facade toward what is now Shell Road is sheathed in vertical one-inch by twelve-inch planks whose weather joint was covered with a "Batten", forming the construction system advocated in the 1850s by Andrew Jackson Downing in *the Architecture of Country Houses* (New York, 1851) (Photo 5). This system, and an exactly similar profile of batten were used in the 1870s in the construction of many of the first buildings of nearby Cape May Point, including the Sloan Guest House (512 Pearl Ave.). This similarity of construction method suggests that the first portion of the Bivalve docks and sheds were built shortly after the extension of the railroad to what was then called Long Reach -- perhaps using materials from local mills. Later materials, including tongue and groove surfaces presumably refer to later phases of construction including the major enlargement of the early 20th century, c. 1904.

The shucking and packing houses are two stories in height with the second story spanning grade-level openings that permit access to the separate docks to the rear. Because the structures were built separately, each portion is different - including fenestration, doors, and other elements. Unity comes from the common lengths of building materials, and the common purpose which the building served.

Though most of the operations of the buildings were by hand, the remains of some machinery are extant as well. The principal artifact is a conveyor at the north end of the long building (Photo 4). Its four posts and portions of the machinery are still in place, attesting to the volume of material that was shipped each day. With the collapse of the oyster business, most other pieces of machinery have been removed. This has resulted in further losses

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Section 7 Page 3

Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
Cumberland County, New Jersey

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as the railroads stopped serving the site, resulting in the removal of the rail tracks and the demolition of the buildings on the shore side of the railroad tracks. In recent years, the water side buildings have been converted to a variety of uses from storage to residences. Interiors range from dropped ceilings and modern paneling to rough studded and unfinished walls of buildings used for storage. Because the original interiors were little more than the insides of the outside materials, there is little that could be removed that would affect interior integrity. Most are in poor condition and have a low to moderate degree of integrity that is sufficient to convey their original nature and purpose.

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Section 8 Page 1

Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
Cumberland County, New Jersey

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Set amidst the marsh grasses and drainage canals, beyond the built-up portion of Port Norris, is a long range of buildings largely belonging to the Bivalve Packing Company. These once formed a part of the docks, packing houses and railroad sidings of an immense oyster industry that made the fortunes of Port Norris residents at the end of the 19th and into the middle of the 20th century.¹ Until the arrival of the Bridgeton and Port Norris Railroad in 1872, Port Norris had been a modestly successful maritime community, harvesting and selling oysters that were shipped in locally-made coastal schooners up the Delaware to Philadelphia. With the speed of railroad transportation, and then, at the end of the century, with refrigeration, the oystering business was transformed into a national activity with oysters reaching markets as far west as Kansas City, Missouri. The oyster packing houses that survive along the Maurice River at Bivalve are the principal surviving relics of this industry.²

The early history of the local oyster industry is discussed by Lucius Q. C. Elmer in his 1869 *History of the Early Settlement and Progress of Cumberland County*.³ The industry shifted from a primarily maritime harvesting to a larger processing industry with the arrival of the railroad in Port Norris in 1872 making oystering the dominant work of the community.⁴ The speed and economy of railroad shipping opened up inland markets across the eastern half of the United States, but mechanical refrigeration transformed the industry.⁵ With refrigeration, oysters could be shipped shucked, making for a great reduction in volume and correspondingly reducing the price of oysters. By the early 20th century, Maurice River cove oysters were served from Baltimore to New York and west as far as Kansas City, following the routes of the Pennsylvania Railroad. With these enlarged markets, the oyster industry was soon employing more than a thousand workers divided between the mariners who sailed the oyster schooners and the shuckers and packers who worked in the packing houses adjacent to the docks. This created a labor market for shuckers and packers that transformed the economy and the population of Port Norris.

The opportunity presented by refrigeration for shipping shucked and packed oysters also affected the waterfront buildings. Instead of simply off-loading oysters from boats onto wharves and then loading them from rail platforms on to railroad cars, the new technology produced packing houses. These were best located between the docks where the oysters arrived and the rail platforms where they were shipped. With this addition the oyster docks and packing houses reached their mature and distinctive form. As architecture, they combined elements of traditional maritime and railroad

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Section 8 Page 2

Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
Cumberland County, New Jersey

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construction - the later buildings continued the old board and batten construction of freight sheds, though without the ornamental elements that linked railroad architecture to its setting.

Deeds provide clues about the construction of the docks and the impetus for their construction. Most of the marsh land was held by the Robbins family, who had been early settlers of the region. Sales are recorded in the 1870s and 1880s. In the latter decade this presumably reflected purchases to extend earlier docks as the industry grew.⁶ With the railroad holding the right-of-way by the 1870s, the later sales in the 1880s were for the production buildings that lined the railroads. The shippers retained these holdings until after World War II when the owners of the docks partitioned their shares, beginning a process of change. This occurred as trucking challenged railroads, and later as the oyster business declined, and the railroads abandoned their routes.

Like cannery rows in other maritime communities, these buildings have been modified with a minimum capital investment. The result is a broad array of surfaces, from the original wood to asphalt. More recently, asbestos shingle and metal and vinyl siding have been added. Since World War II, the region's oyster crop has been affected by dermo and MSX, parasites that render the oysters unfit for market. Between 1991 and 1994, there have been no successful oyster harvests.⁷ With the loss of investment incentives as the oyster business has diminished, the buildings have gradually deteriorated to their present condition. Many have changed use as well, becoming storage facilities for fishermen and more recently a portion has been used as the offices of the New Jersey Marine Patrol.

Despite these changes, the buildings convey their original purpose and provide one of the last links to the oyster industry that dominated the economy of Commercial Township from its inception in 1872 to the present. As such, they meet Criterion A for being associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the local history and warrant being placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
Cumberland County, New Jersey

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Notes

1. The nomination for the Bivalve Packing Company Oyster Packing Houses was assembled as a part of a cultural resources survey and resulting studies of Commercial Township, funded by the United States National Park Service. Copies of survey data are on file with the Office of New Jersey Heritage, Trenton, New Jersey, and with the planning office of Commercial Township, New Jersey.

2. The industry attracted black workers who were the shuckers and packers, contrasting with the native local maritime workforce. The black population soon established its own Shiloh Methodist Church on Main Street (since moved to Memorial Ave).

3. (Bridgeton, NJ: George F. Nixon, 1869), p. 76.

4. D.J. Stewart, *Combination Atlas of Cumberland County* (Philadelphia, 1876), pl. 38.

5. The great ice shortage of 1890 occurred because of a mild winter, resulting in a huge boom in the artificial refrigeration industry. See George E. Thomas, Ph.D. "York Manufacturing Company, York, PA," HABS documentation, 1994.

6. This tracks the deed for the property presently owned by Roger Allen. Deeds records are on deposit in the Cumberland County Court House, Bridgeton, New Jersey, deed office. Vol. 1816, p. 59. Vol. 600, p. 42, describes a frame oyster shed and Wharf, with the wharf line established by riparian commission; the chain of title goes back via a series of deeds to vol. 182, p. 105 (25 June 1886), and to vol. 165, p. 552 (12 February 1882). A large tract of 2700 feet along the water was sold by George Robbins to the Cumberland and Maurice River Railroad (vol. 182, p. 105; 25 June 1886); Robbins had sold a similar tract to the Union Oyster Company of Baltimore, MD, vol. 166, p. 380 (5 June 1882). These sales marked the acquisition of the original oyster docks and right of way to the railroads and probably marked the moment when the present buildings were constructed.

7. See Douglas Campbell, "Delaware Bay oyster harvest foiled again," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 June 1995, sec. 2, p. 1, col. 3.

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Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
Cumberland County, New Jersey

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Manuscript and unpublished sources:

Wild and Scenic Rivers Study, in draft, NPS 1987, 1988

Port Norris, Archeological Study

ONJH Resource Survey, coal fired Generating Facilities Sites, Historic Sites
Research, 1981

Cumberland County Register of Historic Structures and Sites

"Maurice River Cove Oyster Shippers Association," Corporations Vol. B; p.
247, Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton.

Baptist Church of Port Norris, Corporations Vol. A, p. 45; Methodist Church
of Port Norris Corporations Vol. A. p. 9.

Grantor-Grantee Index and property deeds, Cumberland County Courthouse.

Maps, Atlases and Directories in local libraries:

Boyd's Directory of Cumberland County. Philadelphia, 1893-1894.

Boyd's Directory of Cumberland and Salem Counties New Jersey. Philadelphia:
C. E. Howe Co., 1905-1906.

Stewart, D. J. *Combination Atlas of Cumberland County.* Philadelphia, 1876.

Sanborn's Atlas of Port Norris. 1920.

Beck, Henry C. *Forgotten Towns of South Jersey.* New Brunswick, Rutgers UP,
1961.

Cawley, James. *Exploring the Little Rivers of New Jersey.* 3d ed. New
Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971.

Cumberland County Biographical Review. Chicago, 1895.

Cushing, Thomas M.D. and Charles E. Sheppard, Esq. *History of the Counties
of Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland New Jersey.* Philadelphia: Everts
& Peck, 1883.

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Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
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Elmer, Lucius Q. C. *History of the Early Settlement and Progress of Cumberland County New Jersey; and of the Currency of this and the Adjoining Colonies.* Bridgeton, New Jersey: George F. Nixon, 1869.

Sheppard, Charles. "Cumberland County." In *South Jersey: A History.* Edited by Alfred Heston. Vol.1, 1664-1924. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co.

Regional Maritime Industry:

Guthorn, Peter. *The Sea Bright Skiff and other Jersey Shore Birds.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971.

Mints, Margaret and Alex Ogden. *Man, the Sea and Industry: A History of Life on the Delaware Bay from 1492 to 1992.* Port Norris, NJ: Privately printed, 1992.

Tyler, David B. *Delaware: The Bay & River, A Pictorial History.* Cambridge, MD: Cornell Maritime Press, 1955.

Newspaper:

Millville Republican. 1867.

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Section 10 Page 1

Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
Cumberland County, New Jersey

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary runs north along the west bank of the Maurice River from a point at a bend in Shell Road, to the extension of Howard Street which marks the last of the original buildings. To the north-west is the new construction of the Rutgers Research Center. The property runs along the Rutgers University property to the Maurice river, then returns to a point even with the bend in Shell Road comprising properties listed as blocks 266 4.02 through 266-12.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries encompass the site of the Bivalve packing houses, and the site of the removed rail lines. It is terminated on the north west by the new Rutgers Research Center and on the southeast by cleared land.

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Bivalve Packing Houses and Docks
Cumberland County, New Jersey

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List of Photographs

West building, Shellpile Bivalve Packing Houses
Port Norris, Commercial Township Cumberland County, NJ
George E. Thomas Photographer, 1994
George E. Thomas Associates, 223 East Evergreen Ave, Phila. 19118
View looking south at north-east corner
Photo Number 1

West building, Shellpile Bivalve Packing Houses
Port Norris, Commercial Township Cumberland County, NJ
George E. Thomas Photographer, 1994
George E. Thomas Associates, 223 East Evergreen Ave, Phila. 19118
View looking south at east end of west building
Photo Number 2

Main building, Shellpile Bivalve Packing Houses
Port Norris, Commercial Township Cumberland County, NJ
George E. Thomas Photographer, 1994
George E. Thomas Associates, 223 East Evergreen Ave, Phila. 19118
View looking southeast at north wall of main building
Photo Number 3

Conveyor, main building, Shellpile Bivalve Packing Houses
Port Norris, Commercial Township Cumberland County, NJ
George E. Thomas Photographer, 1994
George E. Thomas Associates, 223 East Evergreen Ave, Phila. 19118
View looking east
Photo Number 4

Main building Shellpile Bivalve Packing Houses
Port Norris, Commercial Township Cumberland County, NJ
George E. Thomas Photographer, 1994
George E. Thomas Associates, 223 East Evergreen Ave, Phila. 19118
View looking at detail of original board and batten siding
Photo Number 5

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Dockside, Shellpile Bivalve Packing Houses
Port Norris, Commercial Township Cumberland County, NJ
George E. Thomas Photographer, 1994
George E. Thomas Associates, 223 East Evergreen Ave, Phila. 19118
View looking east along wall of packing house
Photo Number 6

Docks, Shellpile Bivalve Packing Houses
Port Norris, Commercial Township Cumberland County, NJ
George E. Thomas Photographer, 1994
George E. Thomas Associates, 223 East Evergreen Ave, Phila. 19118
View looking southeast toward Maurice River
Photo Number 7

East buildings, Shellpile Bivalve Packing Houses
Port Norris, Commercial Township Cumberland County, NJ
George E. Thomas Photographer, 1994
George E. Thomas Associates, 223 East Evergreen Ave, Phila. 19118
View looking east
Photo Number 8

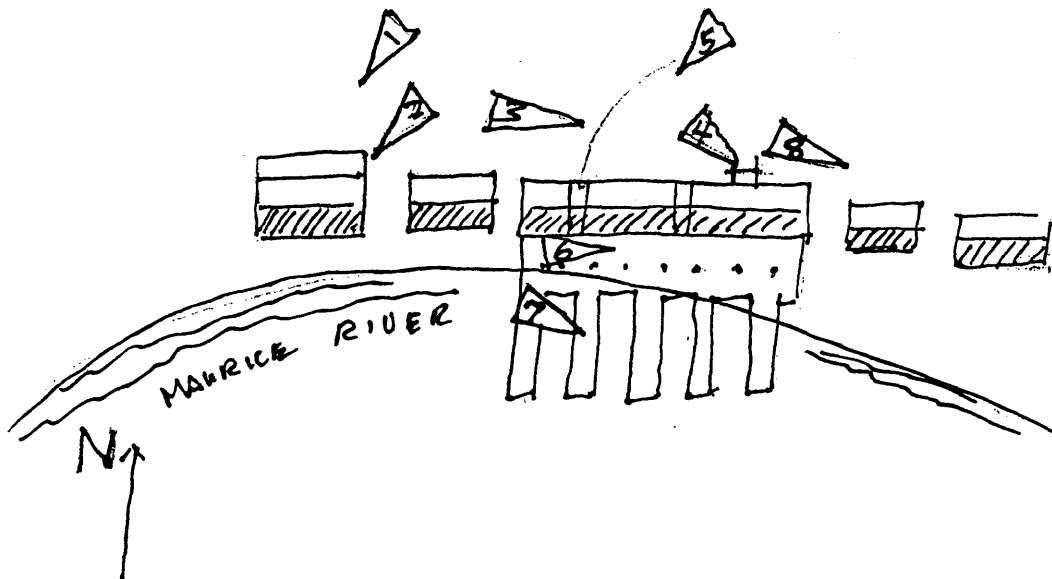


BUILDINGS



PHOTO VIEWS

NO SCALE PROVIDED



Bivalve Oyster Packing Houses & Docks
Bivalve, Commercial Township
Cumberland County, NJ