

**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 *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Lowell's Boat Shop
other names/site number Hiram Lowell and Sons

2. Location

street & number 459 Main Street not for publication
city, town Amesbury vicinity
state Massachusetts code MA county Essex code 009 zip code 0913

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>2</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>2</u>	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 2

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Industry: Manufacturing Facility

Industry: Manufacturing Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Early Republic: Federal

foundation stone and woodwalls wood-weatherboard

roof wood/asphaltother

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Lowell's Boat Shop, a circa 1793 business owned and operated since 1976 by Malcolm J. and Marjorie Odell, stands on the banks of the Merrimack River on lots 42 and 43 in the town of Amesbury, Massachusetts. The shop's address is 459 Main Street, adjacent to the intersection of Main Street and Clark's Road, in the middle of a residential neighborhood that dates from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The shop stands on a 1/3-acre lot that abruptly slopes to the river bank; the 2-1/2-story shop is set against the slope, with the first floor at river level and the second floor at street level. [1] The shop consists of a series of gable-front, barn-type buildings that incorporate the original building, dating to circa 1793, an 1806-built shop moved to the site in 1860, an 1860 addition to the 1793 shop, and two 1946 additions.

SIMEON LOWELL'S ORIGINAL BOAT SHOP (1793)

The original shop, built by Simeon Lowell in or around 1793, sits on a fieldstone foundation and is a rectangular wood frame structure 25 by 55 feet in area. All the wood visible in the shop's construction is native pine. The shop's two stories are divided into a first floor former paint shop, now used for storage, the second floor boat shop, and a half-story loft used for drying the timber to build the boats. The building is framed with post and beams that are reinforced with diagonal trusses on the second floor and ship's knees on the first floor. The beams that support the second floor are deck beams, placed so that the

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D NHL 1,2,4

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Maritime

1793-1940

1793, 1860

Industry

1793-1940

NHL XII-A-2: Business, Manufacturing
Organizations, Transportation

Cultural Affiliation

Equipment

N/A

NHL XII-L: Business: Shipping and
Transportation

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

Simeon Lowell

Simeon Lowell

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Lowell's Boat Shop, established by Simeon Lowell in 1793, is the oldest, continually operating boat shop in the United States. Generally credited as the designer and builder of the typical American dory, Simeon Lowell and his descendants built this craft, as well as other boats, on the banks of the Merrimack River until 1976, when the shop was purchased by the present owner, who continues the tradition. The dory, arguably the most famous American small craft, was the typical American fishing boat for inshore and offshore fisheries throughout the 19th century and well into the mid-20th century, and influenced the design of some fishing vessels that were built with greater deck area to accommodate stacks of these boats. The dory was also the first type of American small boat to be mass-produced on a small scale. Dories have been built at Lowell's, at the same site, in the same building, for one hundred and ninety-six years.

The preceding statement of significance is based on the more detailed statements that follow.

9. Major Bibliographical References

PLEASE SEE FOOTNOTES CITED IN TEXT.

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

MHC Inventory of Historic Assets #17

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one

UTM References

A

1	9
---	---

3	4	3	5	5	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

4	7	4	4	8	5	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

C

--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B

--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Zone Easting Northing

D

--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See Assessor's Map

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary is the same that has been historically associated with the property since 1793 and is the same as the National Register nomination's.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James P. Delgado, Maritime Historian
organization National Park Service date January 8, 1990
street & number P.O. Box 37127 telephone (202) 343-9528
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20013

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

characteristic curve that gives a deck camber is upside down. The knees and deck beams are probably unused ship parts and reinforce local tradition that Simeon Lowell was first a shipbuilder before turning his hand to small craft. There are no interior posts in the mid-floor areas; the knees and deck beams provide adequate support for the first and second floors, and iron tie rods support the half-story loft and roof. [2]

The shop is sided with clapboards on the street elevation, painted white, interrupted by a pair of double doors. A loft door above the double doors has a fixed beam, fitted with block and tackle, used to stow timber in the loft. The other elevations of the shop are covered with wood shingles. The windows are double-hung wood sashes, six over six, with plain surrounds. The gable roof is shingled; there are two brick chimneys. In 1860, increased business led to an expansion of the shop. The original shop, a five-bay structure then 25 by 45 feet in area, was lengthened by a riverside addition of a ten-foot bay; this bay is now sheathed with asphalt shingles.

The interior of the shop is unpainted and lined with work benches. The second floor is the boat building area and is taken up with three boat beds. After the bottom of the boats are built, the transom and stem are added. Called a "skillet," this assembly is mounted, upside down, on the bed, where the bottom is beveled to match the garboard's slope. The stems of the boats are lined up with the corner of a house across the street, a practice of the shop that dates back as far as anyone can remember. The shop was described by one of the owners in 1985. As was the case in both 1793 and today, "far from being a warm environment in which to work, Lowell's Shop is heated with a woodstove and wood furnace which are started each morning. There is no insulation, few storm windows, and at times during winter it is almost impossible to work for the first hour or so in the morning. Tools are warmed by the stove and the temperature stands at 50-55 degrees." [3]

A truss on this floor that supports the third (loft) floor is stamped with dates and boat production figures. The earliest date is 1897, when 1,915 boats were built. The last date is

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 3

1920, when 769 boats were built. For the year 1901, the production figure is an illegible "1---" indicating that at least 1,000 boats were built that year. The total production figures stamped on the truss, not counting 1901, come to 32,524 boats, with the peak years being 1911 (2,029 boats); 1906 (1,753 boats); and 1905 (1,724 boats). The first, or ground floor, was originally used for painting. A six-to-eight-inch thick layer of paint coats the floor and lines the walls from splatters. This floor is now used for storage, particularly of oak planks, which require a dark, cool place to cure. The third floor, or the loft, is an open half-story used to store and dry pine.

TRUE'S BOAT SHOP (1806), ADDED 1860

At the same time, another boat shop, reportedly built in 1806 by a defunct competitor, the Trues, was moved on site next to the Lowell shop. Placed four feet apart, each shop had much of their adjoining sidewalls removed, the intervening space was roofed over, and the gap filled with stairwells that lead to the loft above and the first floor below. A small, one-hole indoor privy, known in the shop as "the head," in nautical manner, was built at the river end of the space. The Trues' shop building is a 25-by-40-foot structure with six 8-foot, 4-inch bays. The Trues shop building, like the original Lowell shop, has a single sliding loft door flanked by two 6/6 attic windows, with four wooden sash windows, 6/6, on the street facade. [4]

The interior of this shop, now another room in the larger shop building, is unfinished and houses many of the power tools used by the boat builders. Among the more notable "modern" power tools is a bandsaw that apparently dates to before 1892. The first floor below is used for oak plank storage; the loft floor above is also employed for storage, particularly wood shavings, which are kept in a bin and distributed, free of charge, to local farmers for their animals to bed in.

RALPH LOWELL'S SHOWROOM AND OFFICE (1946)

In 1946, two additions were made to the shop by Ralph Lowell, the last family member to own the business, in anticipation of

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 4

increased business. A single-story, wood frame showroom 32 by 36 feet in plan, was built at the end of the shop, on the "upstream end." This showroom was converted into a paintshop at a later date. Another addition, to the downstream end, added a single-story, wood frame office, 20 by 18 feet in plan. The same year Lowell repainted the exterior white, the first departure from the original dory brown. [5] The additions are generally harmonious with the earlier construction and structurally relate the story of a nearly 200-year-old business's gradual increase in production and fortune through the end of the Second World War.

THE BOATS OF LOWELL'S BOAT SHOP

The first boats built by Simeon Lowell in his shop were "wherries," a small, flat-bottomed rowboat. From these craft and the bateaux (a flat-bottomed, double-ended, chine-built small boat) that gained fame because of its wide use during the French and Indian Wars, the general "dory" type of boat was presumably developed by Simeon Lowell and other boatbuilders. The original Lowell's "Swampscott surf dory," generally credited as being the first product of the shop, dating to 1793, if not earlier, continues in production. A later, and truer form of the dory, which developed in the early 19th century, was known as the Banks, or Gloucester Dory. This flat-bottomed, straight-sided lapstrake craft is still built at the shop. Lowell's boat shop also developed the dory-skiff, or Amesbury skiff, a lapstrake craft with square stern and rounded sides, which continues in production.

Lowell's also builds sailing dories, a sport dory with a special support and well for an outboard, lapstrake tenders and prams, dory-skiff hulled sailboats, flat-bottomed rowboats, Merrimack rowing skiffs and Salisbury Point rowing skiffs, developed by the shop in the 1860s for the new sport of recreational rowing. A variation of this boat, known as the Lowell Atlantic, is built by the shop for open-ocean rowing. Lowell's catalog states, "although the dominant construction is New England white pine and oak frames with hot-dip galvanized fastenings, resin bonding and mahogany planks as well as plywood with bronze and copper fastenings on oak frames are also frequently used....Because we

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

produce a line of stock boats, handbuilt of wood, we are able to modify them to suit the owner's individual requirements. In addition...we produce custom dories and skiffs....Repairs and alterations...are services we offer on a limited basis." [6]

NOTES

1

Amesbury Assessor's Map, Sheet 32.

2

Betsy Friedberg and Peter H. Stott, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form: Lowell's Boat Shop, Amesbury, Massachusetts." (1988) The 1793 date for the shop is based on Simeon Lowell's purchase of the property on which the shop stands, with "dwelling house barn workhouse and wharfe," in that year. See Marjorie R. Odell, "Lowell's Boat Shop: A Historical Perspective," (1985), p. 2.

3

Odell, Op.cit, p. 4.

4

Friedberg and Stott, Op.cit.

5

Ibid and Odell, Op.cit, p. 6.

6

Lowell's Boat Shop, Catalog of boats, (n.d.)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

THE AMERICAN DORY

The origins of the dory are found in the North American adaptation of double-ended, flat-bottomed small craft in Europe. In particular, the bateaux, a double-ended, hard-chine, flat-bottomed boat used by French settlers along the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, was an adaptation of Medieval craft in turn developed from log canoes. The bateaux were used in St. Lawrence fisheries and were adopted by English colonists for river and lake navigation, to the greatest extent during the French and Indian Wars. Large numbers of bateaux and larger bateaux-hulled sailers, such as the Revolutionary War "gondolos" of Lake Champlain, were built through the 19th century. Gradually, though, a specific form of boat was developed for fishing that was known as the "doree" or dory. Howard I. Chapelle, dean of American boat-building historians, credits the bateaux as the probable ancestor of the dory, as does John Gardner, eminent dory historian, who notes the development of the dory simultaneously from the "wherry," a Colonial flat-bottomed rowing workboat. [1]

During the French and Indian Wars, a large number of boat builders from Massachusetts' north shore worked on the lakes building bateaux and whaleboats; a large number also worked at this trade during the Revolutionary War building the same boats during the Revolution "in the greatest boatbuilding operation America had then seen." [2] The models of these boats, as well as new ideas for their use, undoubtedly came home with these men after the war, particularly to the shores of the Merrimack River, where the American dory type was developed and first built.

Simeon Lowell, whose older brother and cousins had worked on the bateaux of Lake Champlain, as well as other local boatbuilders, took these experiences and developed the lineal ancestor of the dory. As John Gardner explains:

It is probable that the knuckles were taken out of the sides of the flat-bottomed but semi-rounded wherry to produce a straight, uniform side flare running back to the stern. To replace the

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

wherry's smallish, high-tucked transom...a narrow, straight-sided, V-shaped plank was substituted, which when raked steeply aft...produced in effect a double-ended boat...such a boat would have been much easier and cheaper to build than the round-sided wherry; in addition it would be admirably suited to mass production out of the native white pine and oak lumber then abundant in the Merrimack Valley...we may assume that this, in substance, was the breakthrough that yielded the...dory. [3]

From its apparent late-18th century introduction, the dory eventually developed into its classic form by the mid-19th century; until by 1850, it can be asserted that there were only "dory-type" boats. The development of Gloucester as the leading fishing port in the world after 1850 led to the need for large numbers of small craft employed by larger fishing vessels off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, trawling with handlines for fish. The "fisherman's" or Banks dory, built at that time for this purpose, was a refinement of the "dory-type" boats built by Simeon Lowell and others.

The Banks dories built for the trade were "so well known and so common a type" that they were employed alongshore for fishing and in time influenced the design of later fishing schooners that were built to accommodate large numbers of dories.

This class of dory originally became popular because it could be lightly, but strongly, built, which made hoisting it in and out of a vessel an easy matter. Also, the dory was so formed that, by the simple removal of the thwarts, a number of these boats could be nested and thus carried in a small space. The dory, although a flat-bottomed boat, was seaworthy, particularly when loaded, and rowed quite easily. [4]

The Banks dory was gradually standardized into five basic sizes (by length of the bottom) by the 1870s and 80s--the 12-, 13-, 14-, 15-, and 16-foot dories. [5] The Banks dory, whatever its

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 4

size, became perhaps the best-known American small craft, in large part probably because of the significance of the fisheries that it served, particularly the Gloucester fishermen, who employed thousands of these boats as standard equipment on their schooners. "Almost everyone knows the fisherman's dory, that is to say the Bank dory. This distinctive boat-type is easily recognized, with its crescent sheer, straight, flaring sides, narrow "tombstone" stern, and comparatively narrow, flat bottom." [6] The boats were the staple of the industry. In the 1850s, handling from the decks of the fishing schooners began to be replaced by handling from dories deployed away from the vessels. In 1859, the Barnstable Patriot reported that the use of dories was "quite general among the Grand Bank fishermen. Codfish will take a hook from a dory while they will not notice a hook from a vessel anchored within a rod of the boat." [7]

While dories were built in various configurations for uses other than Banks fishing, including use as surfboats, outboard fishing boats, and sailing recreational craft, the basic form remained constant. The center for dory production was Essex County, Massachusetts, though the boats were built up and down the eastern seaboard from New York to Maine. While a "generic" boat constructed individually as a part-time, occasional occupation or for individual use, dories were for the most part built in large numbers by boat shops; the center again being in Essex County, on the shores of the Merrimack River. From there, dories were shipped to every fishery in the United States and around the world; dories were used on the Banks, off Cape Cod, in the Gulf, and along the Pacific Coast, particularly in the Pacific Northwest and the Alaskan fisheries, where the last American sailing vessel to work commercially, C.A. Thayer (now a National Historic Landmark) employed this type of boat to fish for cod through the 1950s. Now replaced by new methods of fishing, the dory is built for the most part in its other configurations for alongshore motor fishing and for recreational uses.

LOWELL'S BOAT SHOP

The Merrimack River on Massachusetts' north shore has been a center of shipbuilding and boatbuilding since the mid-17th

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

century. Beginning with the 18th century the center of shipbuilding on the river began to shift from Newbury to Salisbury and Amesbury, neighboring towns on the north bank of the river. In 1713, Gideon Lowell, a shipbuilder from Newbury, relocated to Salisbury Point. By mid-century, a large number of Lowells were engaged in shipbuilding and boatbuilding in Amesbury, and during the French and Indian Wars, an older brother and several cousins of Simeon Lowell, the son of Stephen Lowell (1703-1776) and Gideon's nephew, served with other Merrimack River Valley men building bateaux and other boats on Lake Champlain. Simeon Lowell, the founder of Lowell's Boat Shop, was, according to family tradition, a shipbuilder with seagoing experience. In 1793, Simeon purchased a 3/4-acre plot of land in Amesbury, "be it more or less," with a "dwelling house barn workhouse and wharfe." [8] There Simeon Lowell built his shop and commenced the construction of wherries. Simeon Lowell's boat is credited by local tradition as being the first true North American dory, though it was more likely a product of gradual evolution among the boatbuilding community in which Simeon Lowell was a leading member.

Tradition usually is not completely wrong. The likely kernel of truth in this instance is that some modifications in the form and construction of flat-bottomed colonial wherries probably did take place at the mouth of the Merrimack at the outset of the nineteenth century. And it is wholly natural that Simeon Lowell, as proprietor of the leading boatshop and a successful businessman, should have been accorded the credit by local annalists. [9]

Local tradition records that the first fisherman to purchase a boat from Simeon Lowell was James Phillips of Swampscott, who purchased Lowell's flat-bottomed "wherries" to row his catch ashore through the surf from his fishing vessels offshore. These "Swampscott dories," the first product of Lowell's, were not true dories, representing instead "in resemblance and historical connection...the round-sided colonial wherry..." [10] Lowell built increasing numbers of these vessels through the first

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

decades of the 19th century as the New England fishing industry grew. After 1830, the year of Simeon's death, when the Banks fishery began to be worked in earnest, the Swampscott dory began to be replaced with the first true dories, the product of Lowell's and other boat shops on the shores of the Merrimack. After 1850, (some historians claim around 1858) the Banks dory, the so-called "fisherman's dory," began to be produced in these shops. In January 1857, a local newspaper noted "quite a number of ship carpenters at Salisbury Point are building wherries (dories, invented there) of which they turn out about ten a week. A very profitable business." [11]

The number of boats required increased dramatically as fishing turned to the dory method, and Lowell's, like other boat builders, responded. In 1805, Simeon took in his son Benjamin (1777-1848) as a partner. After Simeon's death, Benjamin in turn took in his son, Hiram (1814-1897). Hiram Lowell reportedly redesigned the shop's wherry, straightening the sides and flattening the shape of the boat so that they were not only simpler to build but stacked one in another, making stowage of large numbers on deck possible, thus benefitting the fishermen. Not surprisingly, under Hiram Lowell the shop prospered, perhaps due to Hiram and to the change in the Banks fishery that Lowell's Boat Shop had responded to. In 1850, Hiram Lowell produced 50 boats a year and employed a single boatbuilder. By 1855, the business had boomed; Lowell, along with his fellow eight boatbuilders in Salisbury, employed 18 men and produced 589 boats a year. By 1860, the business was doing well enough for ten boatbuilders to employ 47 men and produce more than 1,760 boats. Hiram Lowell did well enough to purchase the boat shop of a competitor, the True family, and move it across the river next to his grandfather's shop to expand the operation. [12]

In 1880, special census investigator Henry Hall described the shop and its operation, which at that time was producing more than 500 dories a year; at that time 8,026 dories were built in the United States, 2,851 in Essex County, primarily at Salisbury Point:

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

The business in the shop is organized in a way not seen in any other branches of boat-building, except in the few establishments (not exceeding twenty in the whole country) where ship's boats are built on a large scale. Each man has a special task to perform, as the getting out the boards for the floor, the planks for the sides, the frames, or other pieces, the fitting of the several parts of the boats into place, or the painting or finishing. Each one is paid by the piece, and the result is seen in a degree of rush and hurry in the large shops not noticed in other branches of the art. The boats are built in winter time, and the active work of the men serves to keep them warm in spite of the rather excessive ventilation of the barn-like buildings. [13]

The shop took the name "Hiram Lowell, Boatbuilder," later "Hiram Lowell and Sons," the name by which it was known until 1976, about 1880. The business passed to Frederick E. Lowell (1839-1917), Hiram's son, in 1897, though by that time the business was run by Frederick's son, Frederick Austin Lowell (1862-1945). The business as a general rule passed from the hands of grandfather to grandson, for example from Simeon to Hiram, and from Hiram to Frederick Austin, and from Frederick Austin to his grandson, Ralph Lowell (born 1920), son of Frederick's son, Walter Lowell (1891-1933), and the last family owner of the shop. [14]

The peak year of production was 1911 when 2,029 boats were built; according to production figures stamped on the truss in the shop, between Hiram's death and 1920, the year of Ralph Lowell's birth, the shop produced at least 33,524 boats, with more than 1,500 boats a year built between 1903 and 1913. A Gloucester fishing schooner master, when asked his choice of dories, replied, "We used Lowell dories. Wouldn't use anything else. If you had a Lowell dory, you had the best." [15]

In addition to dories, Hiram Lowell also produced a gentleman's rowing skiff, beginning in the 1860s, and expanded into a line of

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

recreational small craft as rowing caught on as a sport. The U.S. Life-Saving Service, and later the Coast Guard, also had Lowell's build many of their lifeboats and surfboats. After 1913, the demand for dories began to decline; by 1942, fishing fleets had switched to trawling with nets except in the Pacific Northwest, where salmon and cod fishermen continued to employ dories. Wartime production of dories for the Navy and Coast Guard sustained Lowell's, however, and Lowell's employed 15 men to produce an average of 25 dories a week. After the war, Ralph Lowell expanded the business, and continued to do well, despite the end of dory fishing. Summer camps, public beaches on both coasts, and the U.S. Coast Guard used Lowell's dories and other craft for lifeboats, and in the 1950s the shop continued to produce more than a thousand boats a year.

As other shops closed, Lowell's remained in business. The business thrived because of the quality of the product. In 1961, Ralph Lowell explained:

A few years ago, the Coast Guard people came to me and said that every time it was in the market for dories, they told builders to copy a "Hiram Lowell dory," but they didn't have plans and specifications. So I drew up a set, and what did the Coast Guard do but put it out for competitive bidding and another builder got the contract. I was kicking myself for giving away our plans, but after the boats were delivered, the government condemned them, and we ended up building the dories anyway. [16]

Business declined in the late 1950s with the introduction of aluminum and fiberglass boats. In 1960, the shop produced 800 boats; by 1975, the orders were down to 18 boats. In 1976, Ralph Lowell sold the business to the present owner, M. Jamieson "Jim" Odell, who "believed yachtsmen and connoisseurs would be in the market for these beautiful and proven craft." [17] Interest in wooden small craft was increasing; in 1975, WoodenBoat magazine began publication. Jim Odell was correct; the shop now builds between 30 and 60 boats a year, though the increasing number of

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

individual wooden boat builders has hurt the business.

Lowell's Boat Shop, in its heyday one of several such operations in the heart of the boat-building center of the United States, and one of the, if not the (bowing to local tradition) originators of the most famous of America's small craft, has outlasted its competitors. The oldest boat shop in the United States, Lowell's remains in business, building the same boats, in the same fashion, on the same spot, in the same building, for nearly two hundred years.

NOTES

- 1
Howard I. Chappelle, American Small Sailing Craft: Their Design, Development, and Construction (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1951), pp. 33-36, 85; and John Gardner, The Dory Book (Camden, Maine: International Marine Publishing Company, 1978), p. 25.
- 2
Gardner, Op.cit, p. 29.
- 3
Ibid.
- 4
Chappelle, Op.cit, p. 86.
- 5
Henry L. Hall, Report on the Ship-Building Industry of the United States (Tenth Census) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884)
- 6
Gardner, The Dory Book, p. 37.
- 7
Cited in Stan Grayson, "The Oldest Boat Shop in the Country," Nautical Quarterly, XXXI (Autumn 1985), p. 84.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

8
Marjorie R. Odell, "Lowell's Boat Shop: A Historical Perspective," (1985), p. 2.

9
Gardner, Op.cit, p. 29.

10
Ibid, p. 33.

11
Cited in Robert K. Cheney, Maritime History of the Merrimac: Shipbuilding (Newburyport, Massachusetts: Newburyport Press, Inc., 1964) p. 189.

12
Betsy Friedberg and Peter H. Stott, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form: Lowell's Boat Shop, Amesbury, Massachusetts." (1988).

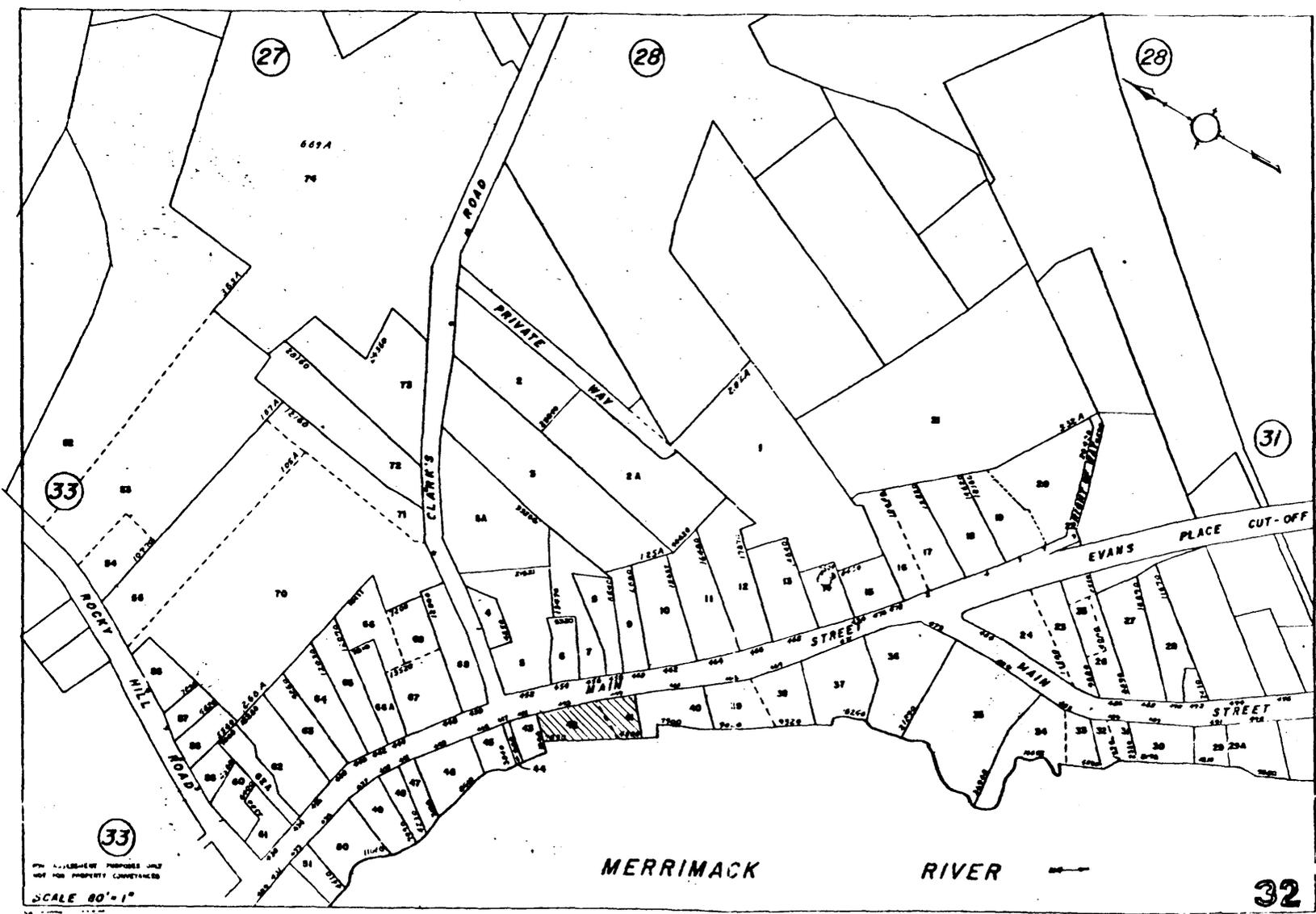
13
Hall, Report on the Ship-Building Industry of the United States, p. 20.

14
Odell, "Lowell's Boat Shop," p. 14.

15
Cited in Grayson, "The Oldest Boat Shop in the Country," p. 83.

16
Samuel T. Williamson, "The Lowells of Amesbury," Yankee Magazine (November 1961) p. 122.

17
Odell, Op.cit, p. 10.



Lowell's Boat Shop, 459 Main Street, Amesbury, Mass.
 Amesbury Assessor's Map, Sheet 32. Lowell's Boat Shop
 identified by hatching of lots 41 and 42.

Lowell's Boat Shop, 459 Main Street, Amesbury, Mass.

Floor plan of Lowell's Boat Shop, as sketched by Malcolm and Marjorie Odell,
November 1985.

