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RECEIVED AUG 21 1979

DATE ENTERED

OCT 25 1979

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

PORT MAHON LIGHT HOUSE

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

NE of Little Creek

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN

Little Creek

VICINITY OF

One

STATE

Delaware

CODE

10

COUNTY

Kent

CODE

1

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER: Abandoned

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

U.S. Air Force

STREET & NUMBER

Dover Air Force Base

CITY, TOWN

Dover,

VICINITY OF

STATE

Delaware 19901

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Kent County Court House

STREET & NUMBER

The Green

CITY, TOWN

Dover

STATE

Delaware

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DELAWARE CULTURAL RESOURCE SURVEY: K-190

DATE

1976

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Hall of Records

CITY, TOWN

Dover

STATE

Delaware

7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION | | CHECK ONE | CHECK ONE |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS | <input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Port Mahon Light House is situated between Kent County Road 89 and the confluence of Mahon River and the Delaware Bay, opposite the south point of Kelly Island in Little Creek Hundred, Kent County, Delaware. The light house site is approximately two and three-quarters miles northeast of the junction of Routes 89 and 9, in Little Creek, Kent County. When built, it stood on fast land, approximately one hundred feet from the bay, but continual shoreline erosion has occurred and the structure is now situated approximately thirty feet in the water.

Erected in 1902-1903, the Port Mahon Light House is the fifth of a succession of navigation aids built in the general vicinity between 1831 and 1902. Initial construction began in 1902 when:

Contract was made for erecting the new light-house, oil house, barn, and wharf, and foundation piles for these structures were driven.

and, in 1903:

The new light-house was finished, the roof sheathed, the floors laid, the exterior painted, and interior wood work put in place and finished. The keeper moved in and the lens was set up in the new lantern. The light was exhibited from the new light-house on June 25, 1903, for the first time.

A letter dated April 30, 1903, and sent to the Light House Board in Washington, D.C., advised that a notice be sent to all mariners advising them of the transfer of the light to its new location on May 15, 1903. At that time, the Light House at Port Mahon was described in its completed state as:

...a two-story, square, frame structure having an iron column foundation and a pyramidal roof, on the center of which is a 4th order lantern. The structure is white with lead-colored trimmings and green shutters on the second-story windows.

The arc of the light ran 180° from north to south. The lantern was mounted in a frame and iron cupola on top of the light house keeper's dwelling and originally painted black. Now removed from the structure, the lantern was noted in 1904 as being of the 4th order, polygonal with a diameter of seven feet and with a single 5/16 of an inch-thick plate. The lantern was of cast iron and brass construction surmounted by a cast iron ventilator ball set in place atop the cupola and was manufactured by Henry Le Ponte of Pons, France. The whole structure was topped with a platinum point lightning rod, soldered to a brass spindle and grounded through a copper ribbon to both the lamp housing and the top of one of the iron supporting piles.

FINANCE

| METHOD | | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> ART | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) : Navigation aid. | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION | | | |

| | | |
|----------------|------|-------------------|
| SPECIFIC DATES | 1903 | BUILDER/ARCHITECT |
|----------------|------|-------------------|

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Port Mahon Light House is significant as a navigational aid on the Delaware Bay, designed to keep offshore vessels away from the Joe Flogger Shoals off Kelly Island, and as a guide to Delaware's sail-powered oyster fleet of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The importance of this particular site for navigation is underscored by the fact that five manned light houses were built in the area between 1831 and 1903, with each one falling in succession to the forces of the increasing shoreline erosion. Today, Port Mahon Light House remains as the last material link to the vitality of Little Creek and Mahon River as the focus of Delaware's oyster industry.

Little is known about the 1831 light house, except its construction cost of \$4,975.00, and that it was rebuilt in 1839 by Winslow Lewis who was contracted to move the structure to safety due to its placement in a salt marsh which regularly flooded, severely damaging the brick foundation. In 1855, the tower of the Lewis' building was remodeled and a new cast iron lantern of the 5th order installed to improve the station's service to navigation. Erosion again necessitated the resiting of the light in 1859 and, in 1860, the United States Light House Establishment negotiated the purchase of a ten-acre lot from the Mahon River Road Company.

From 1861 until 1870 only minor repairs were required for the maintenance of the Port Mahon Light House, but in 1870 a report noted:

--The abrasion of the marsh along the front of the building has been considerable. The building is on the back end of the light-house lot, and the location will have to be changed in a short time. This will require a new lot to be purchased for the building, which can probably be moved without much difficulty or expense.

By 1875, the site of the 1861 station had so badly washed that an alternate plot was chosen north of the old property, and contained two acres bounded on the south by the "Plank Road From Mahon Light to Dover." In 1876:

--The new structure at this station was completed, and the light changed from the old to the new building ... The grounds around the dwelling have been graded and raised, adding greatly to the comfort of the keeper.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Documents pertaining to the Port Mahon Lighthouse, Records Group 26, National Archives

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1/4 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Little Creek, Delaware

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 461531510 41313711510
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nomination includes only the structure.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| | | | |
| | | | |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Dr. Bernard L. Herman, Lecturer

ORGANIZATION

American Studies Program

DATE

April, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

University of Delaware

302-738-2371

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Newark,

Delaware

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

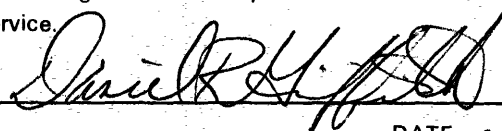
NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE



TITLE

Daniel R. Griffith, Acting Director

DATE

6/4/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER



DATE

10-25-79

ATTEST: Christina Jones
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

10-18-79

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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11/25/78

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

The Port Mahon Light House stands as a two-story, frame structure supported on cast iron posts resting on wood posts driven up to thirty feet into the floor of the marsh. The foundation pilings are further strengthened by diagonally-set tension rods adjusted with screw turnbuckles. The frame superstructure is clad with milled weatherboard and fully circumscribed by a cantilevered deck and independently cantilevered porch roof. The frame superstructure of the light house rests upon cast iron caps bolted to the pilings. A rectangular cupola, finished with board-and-batten siding and an offset, metal-clad pyramidal roof, rests directly atop the pyramidal roof of the main structure. The sub-roof of the main block consists of flush horizontal sheathing covered with raised seam tin cladding. The principal landward facade presents a balanced three-bay, center-door fenestration with one-over-one sliding sash windows and a transom light above the doorway. The balustrade and steps leading up to and following the outer perimeter of the porch have disappeared except for the principal posts carrying the balustrade rails. Two brick flues paralleling the partition walls pierced the roof at the sides to the cupola and provided hearths for the principal first and second-story rooms. Helena Mitchell, whose father Captain Irvin S. Lynch operated the light until 1939 when he retired, recalls the interior of the keeper's quarters as containing eight principal rooms and three smaller ones, finished with walls of panelled oak and brass door hardware. Currently, the interior exhibits the remnants of a center-passage, double-pile plan with a centrally-located stair and two brick chimney piles located one each at the juncture of the partition walls defining the flanking rooms. The stair consists of a straight run of seventeen treads terminating at the second floor with double-turned spherical pendants extending down at the landing. The light house interiors are finished with slightly raised panel, colonial-revival baseboard, vertical narrow board wainscote, double-beaded-edge chairboard, and diagonal narrow plank walling. In the first floor northwest corner room stands a colonial-revival architectural cupboard with raised panel sides and a full entablature. All first-floor doors, hardware, and stair trim have been removed.

Abandoned in 1949, the Port Mahon Light House survives in a much-deteriorated condition. Associated outbuildings have disappeared through neglect, environmental decay and erosion, and the light house itself has lost a large section of floor framing in the center of the western rooms. What remains of the light house structure, however, is structurally stable and the focus for preliminary plans involving the facility's preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive use as a marine police station. Only the structure itself is included in this nomination, as the shoreline which defined its original siting has been severely eroded.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

Tidal wash remained a constant problem, however, and the site was periodically filled in with marsh mud and topped with layers of oyster shell to stabilize the property. By 1894, the erosion problem had again become critical and a proposal was sent to the Federal Light House Board to resite the structure. At first, it was suggested that the 1875 structure be physically moved to a more secure location:

The present building is of wood, the outer walls being lined with brick laid in mortar; hence it would be unwise to attempt its removal over the soft marsh. The Board therefore recommends that a new site be purchased about 1,500 feet NNW. of the present site; also that a detached skeleton wooden tower, specially designed so that it could be moved if necessary, be built for the display of this light upon the proposed new site.

The annual report of 1899 noted once more the imminent loss of the 1875 station to the tides of the Delaware Bay and an appropriation of \$4,000 was made; the following year, bids were solicited for construction of the fifth light in the area. Mr. Benjamin T. Collins of Milford, Delaware, received the contract for erecting the new light in July of 1901 at a price of \$9,994., with a \$7,000. penalty due should the light house be unfinished after a twelve-month period. In 1903, the yearly statement described the finished structure:

The new light-house was finished, the roof sheathed, the floors laid, the exterior painted, and interior woodwork put in place and finished. The keeper moved in and the lens was set up in the new lantern. The light was exhibited from the new light-house on June 25, 1903, for the first time.

A new barn was erected. The iron oil house was erected. The remainder of the iron foundation columns of the new walks were put in place, the deck and railing put on, and the new wharf completed. Good water was obtained by boring. Various repairs were made.

A contract was made for the construction of a road running across the marsh from the highway to the new light-station.

The following year the 1875 light house was surplus^{ed}, sold at auction and the lamp taken down, labeled, packed and placed in storage at the Edgemoor Light House Depot in New Castle County. The new light was manned first by Theodore H. Burton and then in succession by C. F. Burton (1911), Lewis A. Connelly (1911-1912), and Captain Irwin S. Lynch (1912-1939). In 1938, the Port Mahon Light was electrified and operated automatically until 1949, when the Coast Guard replaced the entire complex with a smaller, fully automatic light affixed to a utility pole.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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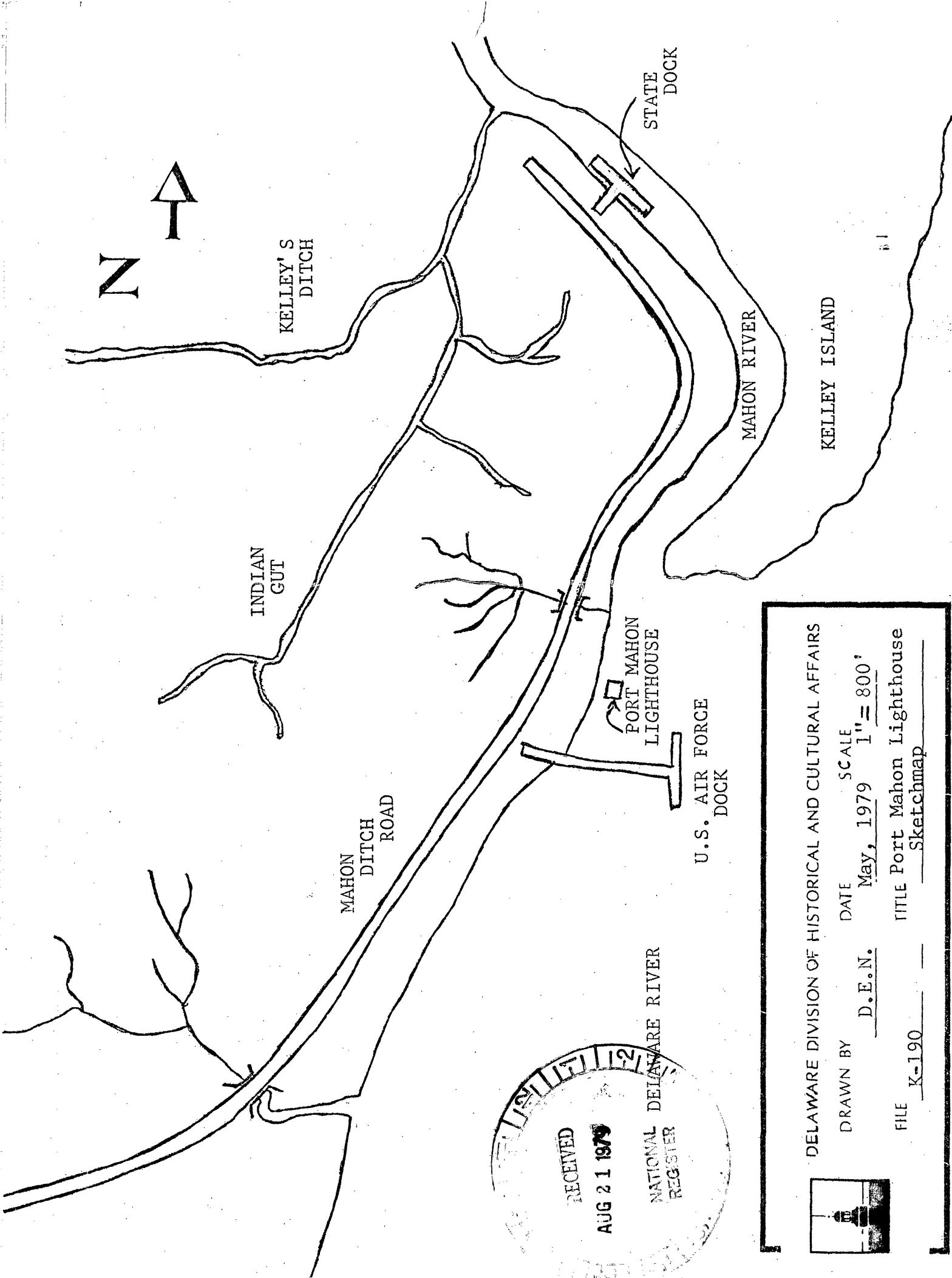
11 25

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

Several of Captain Lynch's children, who grew up in the Port Mahon Light House, recalled how each day the lamp had to be cleaned, refueled with kerosene from the adjacent oil house, and kept lit from sunset to sunrise. A danger signal was displayed by means of red-tinted glass which could be fastened to the light, but in heavy fog when the light was greatly dimmed, Mrs. Lynch would go down to the shoreline and bang kitchen pots together to prevent the incoming oyster schooners from running aground. Until around 1930, Port Mahon remained a primary anchorage for part of Delaware's sail-powered oyster fleet, but in the following years it was gradually abandoned and today only a few vessels remain berthed in the Mahon River. With the disappearance of the oyster schooners, Port Mahon's importance as a local anchorage diminished, leading directly to the facility's final closing in 1939. With its abandonment, the auxilliary buildings for the complex fell into disuse and through the agencies of neglect and heavy weather, have disappeared one by one. The light house itself remains intact and, although deteriorated, proposals have been advanced for its adaptive use.

With its dramatic setting in the vast wetlands adjoining the Delaware Bay, the Port Mahon Light House reflects the last vestiges of the intimate relationship of domestic life and the sea along Delaware's Atlantic coastline. As a navigational aid, the succeeding generations of lights warned passing ocean-going vessels of treacherous shoals and provided a homing beacon for the Delawareans sailing in the great oyster fleet of the nineteenth century. No longer a functioning light-house, the Port Mahon light remains of significance as an evocative link to Delaware's maritime past.



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 AUG 21 1979
 NATIONAL DELAWARE RIVER
 REGISTER

DELAWARE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS
 DRAWN BY D.E.N. DATE May, 1979 SCALE 1" = 800'
 TITLE Port Mahon Lighthouse
 FILE K-190 Sketchmap

