National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page __

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 05001176 Date Listed: 10/20/05

<u>Cumberland</u>

County

Battery Steele Property Name

<u>N/A</u>

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.

Signature of the Keeper

10-20-05

ME

State

Date of Action

___________________________________ Amended Items in Nomination:

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

Engineering is the appropriate area of significance that corresponds to the battery's importance as an outstanding fortification type under Criterion C.

This information was confirmed with Christi Mitchell, National Register Coordinator, MESHPO staff, by telephone.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file Nominating Authority (without attachment)

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

SEP - 6 2005

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 _____Battery Steele

other names/site number U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Battery Construction # 102

2. Location

street & number	Florida Avenue,	Peaks I	sland					N/A	not for publication
city or town	Portland							N/A	_vicinity
state Maine		code	ME	county	Cumberland	code	005	zip c	ode_04108

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

	I and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property tegister criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
	See continuation sheet for additional comments.) 9/2/05
Signature of certifying official/Title	5/APO Date
<u>Maine Historic Preservation</u> State or Federal agency and bureau	Commission
In my opinion, the property] does not meet the National Register criteria. (\Box See continuation sheet for additional
	Date
Signature of certifying official/Title	Date
State or Federal agency and bureau	
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State or Federal agency and bureau ational Park Service Certification certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet. determined eligible for the National Register.	in Cac

CUMBERLAND COUNTY, MAINE County and State

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5. Classification					
Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box) building(s)	Number of Resources within Property(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)ContributingNoncontributing			
 □ public-local □ public-State □ public-Federal 	□ district □ site	<u></u>	buildings		
	⊠ structure		sites		
	·		structures		
			objects		
			Total		
Name of related multiple pro (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a	perty listing multiple property listing.)	Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register			
<u>N/A</u>		None			
6. Function or Use			<u> </u>		
Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)		Current Functions (Enter categories from instr	uctions)		
DEFENSE / Fortification		RECREATION / CUL	TURE / Outdoor Recreation		
DEFENSE / Arms storage		LANDSCAPE / Conservation area			
DEFENSE / Military facility					
		<u> </u>			
·			, 		
·					
7. Description					
Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)		Materials (Enter categories from instructions)			
<u> Other: Standardized World Wa</u>	r II Fortification:				
16" gun battery		foundation <u>CONCR</u>	ETE (reinforced)		
	<u></u>	walls <u>CONCR</u>	ETE (reinforced)		
		EARTH_	·		
		roof <u>CONCRI</u>	ETE (reinforced)		
		EARTH			

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

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BATTERY STEELE
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CUMBERLAND COUNTY, MAINE

DESCRIPTION

Battery Steele (1942-44) is a World War II concrete fortification located on the southeast shore of Peaks Island in Casco Bay, Maine. Designed as part of the Harbor Defenses of Portland to protect the Port of Portland from enemy war ships, this massive structure housed two 16" guns capable of firing a 2000 pound projectile up to 26 miles. The structure, which was decommissioned in 1948, was one unit on the 198 acre Peaks Island Military Reservation. However, 57 years after being abandoned by the U.S. Army, it alone among the structures retains its integrity of design, workmanship, location, setting, association and feeling, and to a lesser extent, materials. The Battery is now located on 13 acres owned by the Peaks Island Land Trust.

Peaks Island is at the southwest end of a line of islands that roughly run from the southwest to northeast across the mouth of Casco Bay. The City of Portland lies 1 ½ miles to the west-northwest of the island, while South Portland is less than one mile to the west, with Cushing Island in between. Peaks Island is part of the City of Portland, and about 800 year round residents live on the island. Most homes and businesses are clustered on the northwest side of the island, where the Forest City Landing and ferry terminal is located. In recent years large year round and summer houses have been built on the west and south sides of the island, along and off the perimeter Shore Road. Some of these domiciles are located on land previously part of the Military Reserve, and several incorporate former military installations into their structures.

Battery Steele runs parallel to the island's coastline, in roughly a southwest to northeast direction. (For ease of reference in this document the Battery will be said to run west to east.) The casemate is set approximately 700 feet to the north of the coastline. Between the south edge of the structure and Shore Road the majority of the low lying land is marshy, and feeds the man-made Great Trout Pond, which is located southwest of the western gun placement and serves as the drainage for the wetlands around the Battery. The north side of the structure is accessed by a dirt road (Florida Avenue) that winds through a medium dense forest of mixed hard and soft wood trees and brush. A small, recent housing subdivision is located within the immediate half mile of inland and coastal land to the north and east of the eastern gun location.

As a completely human-made structure, the earthen covered concrete battery interrupts the generally low lying coastal plain. The elongated structure measures approximately 630 feet from end to end (at grade level), rises to approximately 64 feet above grade, and is between 100 and 145 feet wide. The footprint of the structure is that of an elongated rectangle with projecting gun turrets on the south elevation at the west and east terminal ends. Along the north elevation the center of the mass gently bulges towards the north. The battery is covered with earth and boulders and supports a large variety of trees, shrubs, and bushes which provide camouflage and concealment. Presently several footpaths and one set of wooden stairs provide access up the sloping mound and along the structure's ridge.

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The backbone of this fortification is a fifteen foot wide corridor that runs along an east-west axis and connects the gun casemates at either end of the battery. The corridor is accessed from the exterior at three points: through identical transverse portals at each gun installation and via a third portal at the center of the structure's bulge on the north elevation. On the north side, the terminal portals measure 13' high and 18' wide. They are lined initially with concrete retaining walls before passing into the center of the structure where they intersect the longitudinal corridor. Here, the entrance opens into a large chamber, roughly 52' wide and 32' deep. The roof line of this chamber is extended via a semi-circular concrete canopy between five and ten feet thick and 19' 6" in radius. The floor of the chamber also continues past the southern aperture for approximately 30' and provides an apron shaped burster course. As originally designed, the floor of the inner chamber dropped 17' below grade to provide a subterranean 'flower pot' shaped seat for the gun carriage, and thick steel shields encapsulated the gun barrel and blocked the southern (seaward) face of the chambers. Although the corridor terminates behind the gun casements, storage rooms were located under the far western and eastern ends of the structure. (See plan 1, "16" Casemated Battery Structural Features" for additional details.)

In the interior of the battery a bank of rooms open off the center of the corridor to the north. From east to west these functioned as follows: men's latrine, officer's latrine, shell storage room, two powder rooms flanking a transverse corridor, another shell storage room and two small storerooms. A short staircase at the north end of this central corridor leads to a power control room, from which is further accessed a workroom, two air-conditioning control rooms, the muffler gallery and the north entrance.

Battery Steele has been privately owned since 1948. Almost continually since then the structure has been accessible by the public. Graffiti covers many of the interior walls, while the walls of the west gun chamber is blackened from numerous campfires. With the exception of the entrance portals and the gun canopies, the entire structure is covered by earthworks. The western canopy and the sides of the embrasure were painted in gold and brown stripes in 1976. The depressions for the gun carriages were filled in a year earlier.

Battery Steele was constructed between 1942 and 1944 by the U.S Corps of Engineers. The battery contained two 16" guns, mounted on barbette carriages, model numbers 4 and 5. The 60' long guns weighed 307,105 pounds and the carriages weighed 665, 315 pounds each. The guns were manufactured by the Watervliet Arsenal in Albany Co., New York in 1943. Battery Steele, along with the other units that comprised the Peaks Island Military Reservation was manned in 1944 and 1945; however the guns were only fired once, in a test that used a reduced powder charge. In 1948 the guns, carriages, and steel shields were cut up and sold for scrap and the powder, shells, electronic and control equipment were removed from the structure. For a short period in the 1980s the structure functioned as the site of an experimental solar energy station, and electricity was reinstalled at that time. Currently only a few wires and conduit are located within the structure and all of the rooms are empty save for rusting re-bar occasionally emerging from decomposing concrete.

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.
- 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.
- 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:

- owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- removed from its original location.
- a birthplace or a grave.
- a cemetery.
- a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- a commemorative property.
- less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

CUMBERLAND COUNTY, MAINE County and State

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions) MILITARY Period of Significance <u>1942-1948</u> Significant Dates 1942 1944 1948 Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) **Cultural Affiliation** Architect/Builder U.S. Army Corps. Of Engineers

Primary location of additional data:

- ⊠ State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- ⊠ Federal agency
- Local government $\overline{\Box}$ University
- ⊠ Other

Name of repository:

National Archives, Fifth Maine Regiment on Peaks Is.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Battery Steele, located on the former Peaks Island Military Reservation on Peaks Island, in Portland, Maine represents the most advanced form of Coast Defense installation developed by the United States Army during World War II. The battery was armed with two 16" guns capable of firing a 2000 pound shot 26 miles to sea. These were the largest, land based guns in the history of American Coastal Defenses, and represents the final development in the 170 year history of defending the Port of Portland and Casco Bay from naval attack. Due to its location as an outer island in the bay with a clear view across the North Atlantic, Peaks Island was chosen as the principal site for Casco Bay's defensive system. Battery Steele was one of forty-three planned primary gun installations of this size nationwide, however by the end of the war only 23 were completed and of these, only 17 were armed. Although the guns, shields, carriages and accompanying controls were destroyed or removed after the war, Battery Steele remains otherwise intact and is an important relic of the end stage of American efforts to mount land based coastal defenses. Battery Steele is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the national level of significance under Criterion A, for its important role in the defense of Casco Bay, and under Criterion C, as Maine's only example of this type of mammoth gun installation, the apex of the Army's Coastal Defense system through World War II.

Portland Harbor has been defended from an enemy naval attack since 1775 when it was burned by the British Navy. With independence the US Army assumed responsibility for the defense of important harbors, and Portland was included in every harbor defense program from 1790 through World War II. The modernization of American harbor defenses was undertaken periodically in an effort to keep up with the increased threat posed by the navies of potential enemy nations. Fortifications were built or modernized in 1808, after the War of 1812, during the Civil War, in the 1870s, the 1890s and during World War I, and Portland was included in each of these programs. By the 1920s the army realized that another generation of defenses was needed, and that the batteries would have to have overhead protection against long range naval gun fire and air attack. However, military budgets were cut drastically during the 1920s, and remained low in the 1930s because of the Great Depression. It was not until the outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939 that the army had the funds to begin planning new defenses. Appropriations to begin the construction of the new generation of fortifications were not approved until the eve of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Portland was again included among the harbors to be defended. In fact, the army and navy ranked Portland as the most important anchorage in the continental US because of its proximity to Europe.

The principal components of the new generation of defenses included secondary gun batteries of two 6 inch guns protected by steel shields and primary gun batteries of two 16 inch guns enclosed in concrete casemates with steel shields covering the openings from which the guns projected. Both types of batteries featured structures built of heavily reinforced concrete which housed gun powder magazines, shell storage rooms, plotting, telephone switchboard and radio rooms, and electrical power plants. The 16 inch batteries had separate plotting, telephone switchboard, spotting, and radio rooms to protect the equipment from the blast of the guns, and the rooms of both six and 16 inch

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batteries were gas proof to defend against poison gas attacks.

The 6-inch batteries were designed to deal with attacks by destroyers and cruisers, while the 16-inch batteries would defend against battleships. Ironically, the guns used in the 16-inch batteries were naval guns, built for use on battleships but made surplus as a result of the Washington Naval Disarmament Treaty of 1921. These massive guns weighed 307,105 pounds, their carriages 665,315 pounds, and they could hurl a 2,000 projectile to a range of 26 miles. The concrete structure in which the guns were mounted was over 600 feet long and 100 feet deep. The goal of the architectural design was to provide maximum protection for the guns and crews. The structure was then covered with earth and rock and graded and planted to appear part of the natural terrain. The openings for the guns were painted in camouflage colors. The estimated cost of construction of the battery in 1940 was \$2,120,000.

In 1940, local defense boards were established in all important harbors to determine the needs and plan the location of the new batteries. The Portland board recommended that 6 inch batteries be built on Peaks Island and Jewell Island, and that 16 inch batteries be built at Cape Elizabeth and on Peaks Island. Later in the war, the 6-inch battery was substituted for the 16-inch battery at Cape Elizabeth, so that the battery on Peaks Island was the only 16-inch battery built. Concrete observation stations to serve the six and 16 inch guns were built along the coast from the Kennebec River to Kennebunkport. The army later determined that defense against enemy torpedo boats had to be provided at each harbor. Portland was assigned eight of these batteries, each of which included four 90 mm and two 40 mm guns. All of the modern batteries were equipped with radar and data computers, so when the new generation was completed, it was the largest and most advanced harbor defense system in the world. Construction of the major batteries began in 1942.

Beginning in the 1890s, all gun batteries had been named, usually after deceased army officers. This practice continued early in World War II, but was abandoned as the army focused its attention on the invasion of Europe and Japan. However, the two batteries built on Peaks Island were named. The 6-inch battery was named in honor of Richard Kerr Cravens, 1870-1933, who rose to the rank of Colonel in the Coast Artillery Corps. On August 20, 1942, the Adjutant General ordered that the 16-inch battery be named in honor of Harry Lee Steele, 1874-1938, who rose to the rank of Major General and Chief of the Coast Artillery Corps. Throughout the history of the US Army, fortifications were also named, usually after deceased army officers. Again, in World War II, few were named, but rather they were referred to as military reservations, in this case, Peaks Island Military Reservation.

The major batteries required a great deal of time to complete, and were not finished until 1945. The 6-inch battery at Cape Elizabeth, construction number 201, was completed, but its guns were not installed. Around the country, work on batteries was halted as the war ended. Of the 41 16 inch batteries planned in the 1940s, 23 were completed but only 17 armed. However, Battery Cravens and Battery Steele were completed and proof-fired to test them.

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The Peaks Island Military Reservation was first designated in the decades prior to World War I. During this time several installations were constructed to support the Harbor Defense Systems of Portland, including a disappearing searchlight, combined range-finding station, two barracks (2), a mess hall and a searchlight power house. In 1942 an updated Harbor Defense Project was developed for the Harbor Defenses of Portland which called for the creation of the following facilities on Peaks Island: two 16" guns at Battery Steele, two 6" guns at what was to be named Battery Craven, two anti-torpedo motorboat batteries (containing 90 mm fixed and mobile guns), a mine casemate, a mine group observation station, a plotting and switchboard station adjacent to a combined fire-control tower and post telephone switchboard station, a combined battery observation station and battery command post, a combined group command post and observation tower, and a radar station tower. Well before the batteries were completed, a cantonment area of temporary barracks, mess halls, and support buildings were constructed behind Battery Steele. The first troops. Battery E of the 8th Coast Artillery Regiment, were moved to the reservation on June 26, 1942. The men were probably housed in temporary guarters until the cantonment area was completed and may have manned one of the anti-motor torpedo boat batteries which were completed in 1942 and 1943. Batteries consisted of about 100 men, and a second one, Battery D, was transferred to the reservation in June of 1943. In August and September, the 2nd Battalion of the 8th

Coast Artillery moved to the reservation and established its headquarters there. By 1944 Battery D had been assigned to Battery Cravens, and early the next year Battery Steele was also manned.

The process of installing the 16" guns on the island was particularly memorable for all involved. The following account was provided by Major Franklin P. Parker, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, the local commander.

"The time was May 1943. The guns had been cast and fabricated at Watervliet arsenal and gun factory, Albany County, New York. They arrived by rail on flat cars, each end of each gun supported on a car, with an idler car between, and were tracked (railroad track)onto a pier at the then new South Portland Shipyard. Normal procedure would be to off-load by hoisting with a derrick barge to a lighter, but all such had been commandeered for a major effort to salvage the *Normandie* sabotaged at her pier in Manhattan. Lacking the lift it was necessary to improvise a scheme for transferring the guns, sixty feet long and very heavy (approximately 50 tons each), one at a time from rail to an old gravel barge, employing gravity and friction. Ramps of steel beams were put in place, outer ends resting on the barge, and the guns slid gingerly sideways down the ramp. As weight came on the barge, it would settle in the water requiring a pause for help by the rising tide. Possibilities for disaster were numerous, but the rigging carried out by Hall Company of Somerville, Mass. was successful.

The barge was towed to Peaks and the process reversed on a falling tide, the receiving medium being two very heavy trailers previously barged across, which were towed to the battery site. My recollection is that the wharf at Peaks Island had to be specially built to get it as low as possible relative to the tides. Probably had no further use."¹

With these two modern batteries ready for action, the obsolete armament at the old forts was

¹ This passage appears in Moulton, Peaks Island An Affectionate History, pp. 86-87.

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scrapped, and the Peaks Island Military Reservation became the most important military post in the harbor.

However, by early 1944 it was obvious that Germany could not launch a major naval attack against the United States. In March, the army began shifting Coast Artillery troops into anti-aircraft and field artillery and sending them to Europe. Further shifts took place in late 1944 and early 1945, and with the surrender of Germany, the Atlantic coast defenses were reduced almost to peace time status, with the troops performing maintenance, care taking and target practice. An editorial in the Washington D.C. Evening Star written in 1947, as the decision was being made to close down the facilities in Casco Bay, reflected that the local residents had little grasped the important role the Harbor Defenses in Casco Bay were to the war effort.

"Residents of the area saw some of the story unfold despite the curtain of strict secrecy drawn about the activities centering there, but even they lacked any real conception of the importance of what they saw. They knew that heavily laden ships in countless numbers assembled off their rocky coast, day after day, only to disappear as mysteriously as they had converged. They knew that navy destroyers and, later in the war, groups of trim little DE's, or destroyer escorts, largely from New England shipyards, usually herded the cargo ships out to sea. They know that planes from nearby airfields and blimps from Weymouth often circled overhead. What they did not fully appreciate was that they were witnessing one aspect of the grim 'Battle of the Atlantic,' a battle to get urgently needed war supplies to our beleaguered Allies in Europe – whatever the cost. Portland, and Casco Bay were, in effect the American approaches to the bridge of ships which helped Britain and Russia to resist and finally throw back the enemy pressing upon them." (*Portland Press Herald*, January 6, 1947, p. 1.)

After the war the American military was rapidly demobilized and budgets slashed. The army concluded that fixed harbor defences were no longer needed in an age of missiles and nuclear weapons. The 90 and 40 mm guns were quickly removed and put into storage, and by 1948, the 6 inch and 16 inch guns were cut up for scrap, and the batteries declared surplus and sold. The Peaks Island Military Reservation was sold in parcels to the City of Portland and other private buyers. In 1957 a brush fire destroyed all twelve of the remaining wooden support structures on the former reservation, and damaged one of the observation towers. In subsequent years the mine casemate, mine observation station and Battery Craven have all been converted into residential structures.¹

¹ Portland Press Herald, May 10, 1957, p. 1, 14.

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CUMBERLAND COUNTY, MAINE

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BATTERY STEELE	CUMBERLAND COUNTY, MAINE
10. Geographical Data	
Acreage of Property 13.071 acres	
UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)	
1 1 9 4 0 4 6 0 4 8 3 4 3 5 Zone Easting Northing 4 8 3 4 2 5 2 1 9 4 0 4 7 1 6 4 8 3 4 2 Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation shee)	Zone Easting Northing 4 1 9 4 0 4 8 8 7 4 8 3 4 6 6 1 □ See continuation sheet
	L., .
Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sho	eet.)
11. Form Prepared By	
	JRAL HISTORIAN, JOEL EASTMAN, HISTORIAN
organization MAINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
street & number <u>55 CAPITOL STREET, STATION</u>	
city or town <u>AUGUSTA</u>	state Zip code04333 -0065
Additional Documentation Submit the following items with the completed form:	
Continuation Sheets	
Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicatir	ng the property's location.
A Sketch map for historic districts and propertie	es 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.)	1
name	telephone
	zip code

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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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CUMBERLAND COUNTY, MAINE

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is fully described by the City of Portland tax map number 86, location A001001.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of the above described property reflect all the land immediately associated with and adjacent to Battery Steele, as currently owned by the Peaks Island Land Trust. Other pieces of the former Peaks Island Military Reservation are owned by the City of Portland or private property owners, and the integrity of the military installations on these parcels have either been destroyed or have lost considerable integrity. This nomination is thus limited only to Battery Steele as represented on the current City of Portland property rolls cited above.

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 of 4 Christi A. Mitchell Maine Historic Preservation Commission 14 February 2005 South elevation of western casemate (gun #1): facing northwest.

Photograph 2 of 4 Christi A. Mitchell Maine Historic Preservation Commission 14 February 2005 North entry to eastern casemate (gun #2): facing southeast.

Photograph 3 of 4 Christi A. Mitchell Maine Historic Preservation Commission 14 February 2005 North middle entrance to power room and muffler gallery: facing south.

Photograph 4 of 4 Christi A. Mitchell Maine Historic Preservation Commission 14 February 2005 Interior view of gun chamber, east casemate (gun #1); facing northeast.

Photographs are labeled and keyed to the 'Topographic Map of Peaks Island,' appended.



