

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Maine
 COUNTY: Cumberland
 FOR NPS USE ONLY
 ENTRY DATE: NOV 1 1974

1. NAME

COMMON: Cumberland and Oxford Canal
 AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: From Sebago Lake Basin to Conant Street
 CITY OR TOWN: Standish, Windham, Gorham & Westbrook CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: 1st: Hon. Peter N. Kyros
 STATE: Maine CODE: 23 COUNTY: Cumberland CODE: 005

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY (Check One) | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC |
|---|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object | <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress |
| PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate) | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>Abandoned</u> |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Various
 STREET AND NUMBER:
 CITY OR TOWN: Standish, Windham, Gorham & Westbrook STATE: Maine CODE: 23

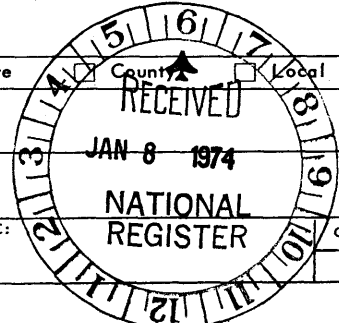
5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Cumberland County Courthouse
 STREET AND NUMBER: 142 Federal Street
 CITY OR TOWN: Portland STATE: Maine CODE: 23

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: None
 DATE OF SURVEY: Federal State County Local
 DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
 STREET AND NUMBER:
 CITY OR TOWN: STATE: CODE:

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



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7. DESCRIPTION

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|------------------------------------|--|
| CONDITION | (Check One) | | | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed | |
| | (Check One) | | | | (Check One) | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered | <input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered | | <input type="checkbox"/> Moved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

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The boundaries of that part of the Cumberland and Oxford Canal to be nominated to the National Register are as follows: Beginning at Sebago Lake Basin in the Town of Standish, the canal runs for 12.25 miles southerly to Conant Street in the Town of Westbrook. The Eastern and Western boundaries are 500 feet on each side from the center line of the canal, with the exception of the area at Gambo Lock where the Eastern boundary widens to include the Oriental Powder Mills.

The above described boundaries encompass an area of 1,525± acres.

The Cumberland and Oxford Canal was designed to open the interior of southern Maine to development by connecting existing bodies of water with Portland Harbor. It was to run from Waterford in Oxford County, Maine to Portland in Cumberland County, Maine. (The section of the canal in Oxford County was never executed, however.) Land surveying began in 1825; excavation began in 1828 and was completed in 1830. The canal opened on June 1, 1830. The entire distance opened to navigation was 38 miles. Eighteen miles of this made use of existing waterways: from Harrison at the head of Long Lake, across Long Lake, down the Songo River and across Sebago Lake to Sebago Lake Basin. From the foot of Sebago Lake Basin the canal followed a southerly and southeasterly route along the western side of the Presumpscot River to Westbrook, turned easterly across the countryside to Stroudwater, and from there followed a course along the eastern bank of the Fore River to the foot of Clark Street at the Portland waterfront.

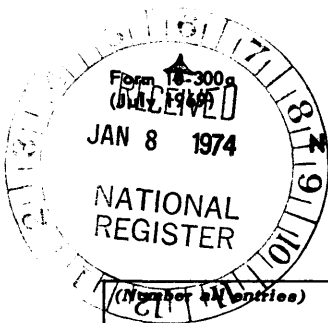
The canal was dug by hand. The earth removed from its bed was piled to one side to form a tow path. The canal was 30 feet wide at the top, 10 feet wide at the bottom and had an average depth of three-and-one-half feet. Because Sebago Lake is 280 feet above sea level, 27 locks with an average lift of about ten feet each were necessary. Each lock was 80 feet long and 10 feet wide. The locks were built of fieldstone or sometimes of cut granite and lined with wooden planking. Two wooden gates were mounted at either end of each lock.

The Cumberland and Oxford Canal had a thriving existence for twenty years, until 1850 when railroads began to take away its business. The canal was taken over by the Canal Bank and sold to private owners in 1859 who operated it until 1872 when it closed.

Most of the well weathered canal bed is visible today, and one can follow the course of the Cumberland and Oxford Canal for seventy per cent of its original length.

At the foot of Sebago Lake Basin, Wescott Lock is still intact. Cut outs in the granite walls show where the gates were mounted. From here the canal flows south to a new power station. The original canal bed has been widened and now called the Eel Weir Canal; it is used today as the channel of the Presumpscot River by the S. D. Warren Paper Company. This is the

(See Continuation Sheet)



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7. DESCRIPTION

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only section of the canal in which water still flows. At the Eel Weir Power Station, the original canal bed leaves the Eel Weir Canal and continues south into what is now North Gorham Pond. The Steep Falls Lock has been obliterated by the power station, but the partial stonework of Blake and Middle Dam Locks is visible. The canal then flows into North Gorham Pond. (Originally the canal and river beds were separate here as in Dundee Pond and lower sections of the Presumpscot River, but modern damming for power stations has flooded them both, enlarging the river, so that it now appears that the canal flows into the river.) Harding Lock is underwater now. At the village of Great Falls (North Gorham), the canal leaves the pond and runs along the western bank of the Presumpscot for one-half mile where it again enters the river at Dundee Pond. Great Falls Lock is covered by a road; some stones from Whipple Lock are visible. There is some question as to whether there were two locks at Whitney Falls, as the accounts of the canal say. Only one lock is visible. From this lock, the canal flows through what is now Dundee Pond. Sandbank Lock is underwater but is visible when the Presumpscot River is drained each year. At Dundee Power Station, the canal leaves the pond and runs south along the western bank of the Presumpscot for a mile and a quarter. The remains of Warren Lock are visible. Below the covered bridge on Hurricane Road (Harry Cane on the map), partial stonework of Upper Well and preserved Lower Kemp Locks remain. The canal bed and its well-rounded bankings are clearly visible throughout this stretch.

Below Lower Kemp Lock, the canal enters the river and continues in the river for one-and-one-quarter miles. It leaves the river just above Newhall Road. From here southeast to Westbrook the canal bed runs beside the Presumpscot River and is clearly visible for the entire six-and-one-half miles. A drop in the canal bed below Newhall Road is Gambo Lock. (If there was only one lock at Whitney Falls, there may have been another lock at Gambo Falls, now covered by Newhall Road.) There are openings in the canal tow-path here, walled in cut granite, used to let water into a large powder mill complex between the canal and the Presumpscot.

Here at Gambo Falls was the Oriental Powder Mills which was founded in 1818 and by 1875 had become the fourth largest producer of gunpowder in the United States. Lester Laflin and Edmond Fowler were the founders and first proprietors. The Cumberland and Oxford Canal proved to be a great boom to the powder mills for here was safe and inexpensive transportation to Portland Harbor.

The Oriental Powder Company ceased operations during the first decade of the 20th century following two serious accidents, one in 1901 and the other in 1904. The cost to rebuild after two great explosions would have been too great so the operation closed.

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7. DESCRIPTION

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Today parts of the foundation of the saltpetre press and corning mills remain at Gambo Falls.

Above the Town of Little Falls, Soule Lock is covered by a road, but below the town, Little Falls is in good condition and Upper Malison and Lower Malison Locks are indicated by drops in the canal bed. The fieldstone end foundations of the aqueduct which carried the canal over the Little River still stand. From the Little River, the canal runs south to Conant Street in Westbrook without a lock and was referred to as the "Long Level". This section has survived in remarkably good condition since it runs through a relatively inaccessible area of pasture land and woods.



SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **June 1, 1830**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Cumberland and Oxford Canal was the only canal of any length built in Maine. It was one of many canals constructed throughout the eastern United States in the first third of the Nineteenth Century.

The Cumberland and Oxford Canal is an example of state involvement in the improvement of transportation and in economic development. The possibility of building a canal from Sebago Lake to Portland was under investigation as early as 1791, but nothing was accomplished until the 1820's. In 1821, the state granted a charter to several prominent residents of Portland and neighboring towns under the name of the "Cumberland and Oxford Canal Corporation" to construct a canal. Holmes Hutchinson, an engineer who worked on the Erie Canal, was hired to survey the route. The state legislature authorized the building of the canal, granting the Canal Corporation the right of eminent domain and the right to use water from existing sources. In 1821, the state legislature established a lottery to raise money for the canal. When this did not raise sufficient funds, the state chartered the Canal Bank, which is still in existence today, to finance the canal.

The Cumberland and Oxford Canal played an important role in the economic development of Cumberland and Oxford Counties before the advent of the railroads. It supplied the City of Portland with much needed raw materials. Produce, lumber, shooks, hoops and firewood were carried down the canal; groceries, furniture and manufactured products were carried inland. The Canal Corporation employed many men as lock keepers and repair personnel. Mill complexes were built along the canal route, using water diverted from the canal for power. For twenty years, the canal was a thriving transportation network.

A unique type of canal boat was developed for use on the canal. They had sleeker lines than most canal boats and were equipped with twin center boards and two collapsing masts (for bridge clearance) so that they could sail across Sebago and Long Lakes and in Portland Harbor. At one time as many as 150 boats operated along the canal. The canal boats delivered firewood to the islands in Casco Bay and occasionally they even sailed as far as Boston, Massachusetts.

(See Continuation Sheet)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Carter, Harland H. "A History of the Cumberland and Oxford Canal." Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History and Government, University of Maine, 1950.
 Dyer, Isaac Watson. "The Cumberland and Oxford Canal." Sprague's Journal of Maine History, Vol. XII (December-June, 1924) 94-113.
 Jones, Herbert G. Sebago Lake Land. Portland: 1949.
 Milliken, Philip I. The Cumberland and Oxford Canal and the Canal Bank. Portland: 1967.

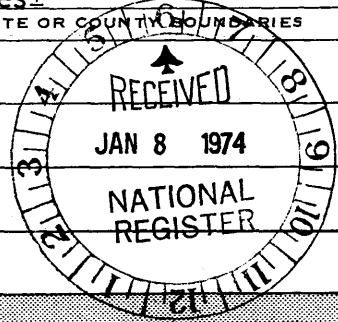
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY | | | | O R | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES | | | | |
|--|----------|---------|---------|---------|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| CORNER | LATITUDE | | | | LONGITUDE | | | | |
| | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds |
| NW | 43 | 49 | 11 | 70 | 29 | 14 | | | |
| NE | 43 | 49 | 53 | 70 | 27 | 12 | | | |
| SE | 43 | 40 | 56 | 70 | 22 | 20 | | | |
| SW | 43 | 40 | 19 | 70 | 24 | 25 | | | |

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **1,475 Acres±**

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

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



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Mary Eliza Wengren, Consultant

ORGANIZATION: **Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc.** DATE: **February 1972**

STREET AND NUMBER:
Station A, Box 4197

CITY OR TOWN: **Portland** STATE: **Maine** CODE: **23**

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name: James A. Mundy
 Title: State Historic Preservation Officer
 Date: January 3, 1974

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Dr. R. W. Madsen
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 11/1/74

ATTEST:
Charles A. Hays
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: 10/4/74

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

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Most of the canal system is visible today. Wescott Lock, Lower Kemp Lock, Little Falls Lock, the aqueduct stonework, the sluiceways and mill complex at Gambo Falls and the canal bed and tow path at the "Long Level" are in especially good condition. The masonry of several other locks is visible. The Cumberland and Oxford Canal is a valuable example of Nineteenth Century engineering and transportation enterprise.

The canal is an important part of Maine's heritage. No longer functioning as a transportation network, the canal has a new role today. The area through which the canal passes remains largely untouched by commercial and residential development. Because of its close proximity to Sebago Lake, the Presumpscot River, the Fore River and the Stroudwater Historic District, the canal provides a unique opportunity for the establishment of historic, recreational, and wildlife areas. Proposals for such a park system are now under study.

