

Form 10-300
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

(Type all entries complete applicable sections)

| |
|---------------------|
| STATE: Michigan |
| COUNTY: Chippewa |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY |
| ENTRY DATE |

1. NAME

COMMON:
The "Soo" Locks

AND/OR HISTORIC:
St. Marys Falls Canal

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
Portage Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Sault Ste. Marie

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:
11th

STATE: Michigan CODE: 26 COUNTY: Chippewa CODE: 033

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____ |
| Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No | | | |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: United States Government

Corps of Engineers; Mr. Clifford Aune

STREET AND NUMBER:
Administration Building, St. Marys Falls Canal

CITY OR TOWN:
Sault Ste. Marie

STATE:
Michigan

CODE:
26

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Registry of Deeds, City-County Building

STREET AND NUMBER:
State Court Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Sault Ste. Marie

STATE:
Michigan

CODE:
26

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: U. S. Army Engineer District, Detroit Corps of Engineers
Detroit, Michigan

DATE OF SURVEY: April, 1966 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Administration Building

STREET AND NUMBER:
St. Marys Falls Canal

CITY OR TOWN:
Sault Ste. Marie

STATE:
Michigan

CODE:
26

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

| |
|---------------------|
| STATE: Michigan |
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| ENTRY NUMBER |
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7. DESCRIPTION

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| CONDITION | (Check One) | | | | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input 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

A massive expanse of some 400 acres, including that portion of the property on water (the property contains 156 land acres), the St. Marys Falls Canal is a prime example of the efforts of the Corps of Engineers in the preservation, maintenance and operation of numerous waterways which were and are such a vital force in the commercial life of the country.

The twenty-two foot difference in elevation between Lake Superior and Lake Huron necessitated the construction of the canal. The St. Marys River connects the two lakes, but rapids, approximately a quarter of a mile wide and three-quarters of a mile long, prevented navigation between the lakes. In 1797 the Northwest Fur Company built a canal on the Canadian side of the river, but that benefited only fur trappers' boats. In 1844 the country's first copper boom occurred in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and the need to eliminate the obstruction between the two lakes became imperative. The construction of a tramway around the rapids in 1851 failed to solve the problem.

In 1853, the Congress granted Michigan some 750,000 acres of land for the construction of a canal system. The first canal located on the American side of the river was constructed by the St. Marys Falls Canal Company. Called the State Canal, the first ship canal was more than 1-1/2 mile long and 64 feet wide at the bottom and 100 feet wide at the surface. There were also two tandem locks built about 350 feet long and 70 feet wide. These locks were destroyed during the excavation for the present Poe Lock.

There are at present four locks which compose the St. Marys Falls Canal. These locks are the MacArthur Lock (1942); the Poe Lock (1968); the Davis Lock (1914); and the Sabin Lock (1919). However, a number of locks were a part of the canal before these.

In 1881 the Weitzel Lock was first opened to traffic. It was 515 feet long, 80 feet wide in the chamber narrowing to 60 feet at the water surface. Then in 1887 construction began on the old Poe Lock. Completed in 1896, the Poe Lock was 704 feet long and 100 feet wide. It originally had 22 feet of water on the sills. The Davis Lock, 1,350 feet long, 80 feet wide was built by the United States between the years 1908 to 1914. It was opened for traffic in 1914. The Sabin Lock was built in 1919 and has the same dimensions as the Davis Lock. In 1942 the MacArthur Lock was constructed. This lock is 800 feet in length and 80 feet in width, having 31 feet of water on the miter sills. The last lock to have been constructed was the new Poe Lock in 1968. The new Poe Lock is by far the largest being 1,200 feet long and 110 feet wide. There are two canals which feed these four locks: The North Canal, which leads to the Sabin and Davis Locks, has a least depth of 23 feet and the South Canal, which leads to the Poe and MacArthur Locks, has a least depth of 275 feet.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input checked="" 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) 1837-present

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input 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 type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The St. Marys Falls Canal, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, has demonstrated exceptional value in the development of commerce in the Northwest. Originally built and operated by the State of Michigan, the canal ranked with the Erie Canal in New York and the Illinois and Michigan Canal in Illinois as one of the most successful of the numerous waterways in the ante-bellum era. The first locks also exemplified how eastern capital underwrote the development of the West, as money from the Atlantic seaboard financed their construction. Finally, the canal enabled the resources of the Lake Superior area to be exploited for the Nation's benefit.

History

The State of Michigan's first attempt to build a canal at Sault Ste. Marie failed. Stimulated by the internal improvements passion of the early 1830's, the two year old state in 1837 approved of a survey for a canal between Lakes Superior and Huron. Two years later laborers began work on a canal, but were soon stopped because of their infringement on the operation of Fort Brady. That ended the project. By 1850 little had been accomplished apropos of internal improvements in general. Thus the State's new constitution, adopted in 1850, contained a proscription against new public projects. Unless, that is, a Federal grant made possible "...an improvement of lasting importance."¹

Michigan's leaders were not oblivious to the possibility of Federal aid before 1850. A Michigan Senator, John Norvell, introduced a bill in Congress in 1839 that would grant public lands to the State for canal purposes. But the bill failed. Not until about thirteen years later did Congress approve such a land grant. President Millard Fillmore on August 26, 1852, signed an act that authorized the transfer of 750,000 acres of mineral and timber lands to Michigan to back the construction of a canal at the St. Marys River.

¹ Carter Goodrich, Government Promotion of American Canals and Railroads-1800-1890, (New York, 1960), p. 145.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

F. Clever Bald, Michigan in Four Centuries, (New York, 1954).
 Willis Frederick Dunbar, Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1965).
 Otto Fowle, Sault Ste. Marie and Its Great Waterway, (New York, 1925).
 Carter Goodrich, Government Promotion of American Canal and Railroads 1800-1890, (New York, 1960).

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 | UTM | | | LATITUDE | | |
| | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds |
| A | 16.701000 | 5153150 | | ° | ' | " |
| B | 16.701175 | 5152500 | | ° | ' | " |
| C | 16.701450 | 5152950 | | ° | ' | " |
| D | 16.701100 | 5152650 | | ° | ' | " |

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF UNIMPROVED PROPERTY: **156.2 (400)**

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

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

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
 Joseph Scott Mendinghall, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force
 ORGANIZATION Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Historic Sites Survey DATE 5/7/75
 STREET AND NUMBER:
 1100 L Street NW.
 CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE D.C. 20240 CODE 11

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 _____
 Title _____
 Date _____

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register. Designated: 11/13/66 date
 Boundary Certified: [Signature] 5-18-76 date
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
 Arch. Surveys
 Boundary Referred: [Signature] 12/1/76 date
 ATTEST: Acting Director, OAHP
 [Signature] Keeper of The National Register
 Date [Signature] 2/15/77

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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7. Description

At present there are two major structures which sit in close proximity to the locks, though there are a number of buildings on the property which include a maritime library, visitors center, boat houses, garages and at least 22 operation stations. The administration building is a three story stone building with a seven story control tower located on the southwest corner. From this vantage point it is possible to look out over the entire complex and into Canada. The administration building houses the offices of the Director, and various other administrative personnel. Located opposite this building to the north is the Davis Building in which is located the post office, reporting room and the lock operation room.

Boundary Information and Justification

The international boundary forms the landmark boundary on the north, northwest, and northeast (A to C on USGS Map). The western boundary is formed by a line drawn from the end of the southwest pier 110 degrees to the international boundary (B to A). The eastern boundary is formed by a line drawn from the terminus of the fence enclosing U. S. property southeast of the southeast pier, northeast 100 degrees to the international boundary (D to C). The southern boundary is defined as follows: Beginning at the western end of the southwest pier (point B on USGS map) continuing eastward along property line of the United States identified by a fence enclosing the southwest pier and U. S. property fronting on Portage Avenue to the junction of the latter with Osborne Boulevard; continuing northeast along U. S. property identified by a fence to a point; thence southeastward along U. S. property line fronting on Park Place to a point; thence northeast following the fence line to the southeast pier; thence southeast along fence line enclosing South east pier and plant basin to the terminus of the fence (point D on the USGS map).

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| STATE | Michigan | |
| COUNTY | Chippewa | |
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St. Marys Falls Canal

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance

Continued

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The land grant spurred a quick response. The State's solons approved a bill in February 1853 that authorized the construction of a canal and empowered the governor to appoint five canal commissioners. The act also stated that the grant of 750,000 acres would be given to the company that built the waterway, providing it was completed within two years. A group of eastern capitalists, which had organized the St. Marys Falls Ship Canal Company in the State of New York in May 1852, won the job. The company and the state signed the agreement on April 5, 1853.

Operation at the site began shortly. Charles T. Harvey, who had interested the financiers involved in the project, became the superintendent of the canal. Early in April he went to Detroit, where he bought supplies and tools and rounded up a work force. By early June, he and 400 laborers were at Sault Ste. Marie. One June 4, the Superintendent turned the first shovel of dirt for the canal. Subsequently, operations were halted by a number of difficulties including dysentery, which prostrated a number of workers, and a devastating cholera epidemic, which cost the lives of over 200 men. A great disappointment occurred in the fall of 1854 when it was discovered that the canal's depth would have to be increased by a foot. Furthermore, the laborers encountered mostly rock in constructing the canal. When completed, the waterway had cost almost \$1,000,000, whereas the early estimates had run from \$260,000 to \$403,500.

The instantaneous success of the canal eased the pain of its expense. The company transferred the canal to the State on May 31, 1855. The State receiving a mile-long waterway that had two 350-foot locks. On June 18, 1855, the steamer Illinois inaugurated the canal, passing from Lake Huron to Lake Superior. In the same year, the canal handled 1,449 tons of ore; in 1860, 114,401 tons. The waterway collected \$4,374 in tolls in 1855 and \$24,660 in 1860. The Federal Government assumed control of the original locks in 1881 and eliminated tolls. Since that time only the icy grip of winter has halted traffic to any real measure.