

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

JAN 16 1996

National Register of Historic Places  
Multiple Property Documentation Form

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

New Submission  Amended Submission

**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

Historic Marine and Architectural Resources of the Maurice River  
Cove

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

The Early Maritime Era of the Maurice River Cove, Cumberland County,  
New Jersey, 1800 - 1875

The Mature Oystering Industry at Port Norris and Bivalve, New Jersey,  
1875 - 1930

**C. Form Prepared by**

name/title George E. Thomas, PH.D.  
organization 223 E. Evergreen Avenue date March 1995  
street & number Philadelphia telephone (215) 247-6787  
city or town Philadelphia state PA zip code 19118

**D. Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] Date 12/11/95  
Signature and title of certifying official  
Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources/DSHPO  
State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

[Signature] Date of Action 2/28/96  
Signature of the Keeper

## Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

|   | Page Numbers |
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| <b>E. Statement of Historic Contexts</b><br>(If more than one historic context is documented, present them in sequential order.)  | 3-7          |
| <b>F. Associated Property Types</b><br>(Provide description, significance, and registration requirements.)  | 8-10         |
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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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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Section E Page 1

NJ Cumberland County NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Historic Marine and Architectural Resources  
of the Maurice River Cove

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Introduction: The Maurice River Cove and its associated communities of Port Norris and its industrial parks of Bivalve and Shellpile formed the principal oystering port of southern New Jersey. The area remains one of the centers of waterman activities along the lower bay. At the mouth of the Maurice River, a port was constructed to serve modern oyster farming. Shortly before the Civil War, oystering changed from a simple gathering and shipping operation to a more profitable and predictable, but also more labor-intensive method of farming the sea. Small oysters were dredged from shallow water beds and placed in deep water beds where they fattened; mature oysters were dredged and placed in tidal creeks oyster for cleaning. Oyster shells not burned for lime were re-deposited in shallow water for young oysters to grow on. These shallow beds were seeded with oyster fry. By the turn of the century, the resulting process was enormously fruitful, producing an average of 90 trainloads of oysters each week for eastern markets. At the height of production, after the arrival of the Bridgeton and Port Norris Railroad in 1876 (later the Cumberland and Maurice River Railroad) and the Jersey Central at the turn of the century, several hundred oyster boats and more than 3000 men were employed in the industry.

By the late 1890s, oystering was organized along the lines of the large business trusts of the turn of the century. The Maurice River Cove Oyster Shippers Association worked to "protect trade by adjusting differences among the members, spreading reliable commercial intelligence, protecting them against the unlawful action by carriers" (in other words, price-fixing to ensure that urban retailers and markets would not lower prices). With Jersey Central capital, refrigerated rail-cars shipped directly from the docks. The industry produced the principal architectural remains of the multi-slip wharves and oystering shacks and sheds along the river front. This investment made Shellpile and Bivalve oysters a nationally-known commodity.

The Maurice River and Port Norris produced a distinctive maritime architecture as well that still survives in the form of the oyster fleet. Most were built as sailing vessels but were later converted to motor power. Though the fleet has largely migrated to the north, enough remains in port to provide a clear picture of the waterman activities of the lower Delaware Bay.

The Maritime History of the Maurice River Cove, Port Norris, Commercial Township was identified as having significance in a Cultural Resources Survey of Commercial Township undertaken by George E. Thomas, Ph.D. of George E. Thomas Associates, Inc. That survey was undertaken for the National Park

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Service and was completed in 1994. Copies of the survey cards are on file with the Office of New Jersey Heritage, Trenton, New Jersey, and at the public library in Millville, Cumberland County, New Jersey. That survey prepared a file on each building over 50 years of age in Commercial Township and, in consultation with Michael Chiarappa, Ph.D., and LuAnn De Cunzo, Ph.D. analyzed the principal themes and historic contexts of the region. From Mr. Chiarappa's work on the coast for the Coastal Heritage Trail, and on his work on the local maritime boat-building industry, it is clear that a maritime theme is appropriate. Such a theme would logically exceed the survey area which was confined to Commercial Township. A larger overview would include the Cohansey and Maurice river basins and would find many additional examples than those listed below. This by definition excludes other resources of interest that are not linked to the Maritime theme.

1. The early Maritime era of the Maurice River Cove 1800 - 1875

In the early years of the 19th century, market forces and technological innovation transformed the Maurice River Cove from its origins as a settlement dependent on subsistence farming and harvesting of natural resources to an important center of maritime activity. From the earliest days, the succulent delicacy of Delaware Bay oysters were a valued resource of the region. Because of the popularity of oysters in the European diet, oysters were one of the most sought after marine delicacies, ensuring a considerable market in east coast cities.<sup>1</sup> Oysters could survive out of water for several days, making it possible to ship live oysters to centers of population. In the years before rail and highway transportation, coastal sailing vessels both harvested and transported the oysters to Philadelphia, New York, and other cities, creating parallel industries of shipbuilding and coastal sailing that continued to flourish into the 20th century. By the early 19th century, the availability of local hardwoods and rot-resistant cedar led to the beginnings of a ship-building industry that built shallops for the beginning of the oyster trade up the Delaware River to Philadelphia.

The growth of the oyster industry in the 19th century transformed Port Norris from its 18th century roots as Dallas Landing. This was little more than a shipping point at the first solid land along the Maurice River that became a significant center of maritime-related industry. These activities supported the growth of the village from the six or eight houses reported in 1834 to a community of 500 by the arrival of the railroads in 1872.<sup>2</sup> Within another generation Port Norris tripled in population. Several thousands lived in the community at its height in the early 20th century.

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In the early years of the 19th century, it was discovered that oysters could be "farmed," making the shellfish larger and more succulent by transplanting mature oysters from the Delaware Bay bed to the mouth of the Maurice River. By mid-century, experiments in "re-seeding" the bay oyster beds with immature oysters further enlarged the possibilities of transforming oystering from simple gathering to a sophisticated form of aquaculture. By the Civil War, oystering work had become the principal work of the region.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the support of the maritime trades, the forests in southern New Jersey provided good sources of the principal woods of American ship-building, including oak and cedar. Several factors led to the construction of shipyards in Port Norris and nearby on the Maurice River, including Dorchester, Mauricetown and Leesburg. These factors included the availability of water-powered saw mills further up the river at Millville and in nearby Buckshutem, the later construction of a steam-powered mill in Port Norris, the availability of wood, and protected, relatively deep water in the rivers. These shipyards produced vessels that were suited to the combination of small river ports and broad reaches of the Delaware Bay. In the 18th century, shallops were built at Port Norris; by the 19th century the handier schooner had replaced the shallop and continued to be built into the early 20th century. Locally-made schooners had a characteristic "spoon" bow and relatively shallow draft to meet the conditions of the bay. Many of these wooden fishing vessels, most originally fore-and-aft (schooner) rigged, but since motorized, survive as part of the Atlantic fishing fleet.<sup>4</sup> One of these vessels, the Clyde A. Phillips, built in 1928 as the A.J. Meerwald in Dorchester, New Jersey is presently being restored at Bivalve to its original appearance as a two-masted schooner.

2. The Mature Oystering Industry at Port Norris and Bivalve 1875 - 1950

The second phase of the maritime development of the region was dependent on railroad transportation and later on ice-making technology. Where oysters were originally shipped in the shell because they could survive out of water for some time, the construction of railroads and later the invention of ice-making machinery made it possible to ship shucked and canned oysters a considerable distance. This put Port Norris oysters on tables as far away as Kansas City. Port Norris's oyster business took advantage of the new technologies in transportation and refrigeration, resulting in considerable growth.

Port Norris's isolated location had slowed the community's initial

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development. With the arrival of the Bridgeton and Port Norris Railroad in the early 1870s, the town began a boom period that lasted until the Depression in the 1930s. Port Norris established a water-to-train link in the marine industrial park located directly on the Maurice River. When this district became large enough to warrant its own Post Office, it was named "Bivalve" to celebrate its tasty products. By 1876, the D.J. Stewart *Illustrated Atlas of Cumberland County, New Jersey* reported that practically the entire community was involved either directly or indirectly in oystering:

Port Norris is located on the Bridgeton and Port Norris Railroad, on the west side of the Maurice River, twenty-two miles from Bridgeton. It is properly the terminus of the above railroad, although, owing to the immense business in the oyster trade, it has been extended about two miles south of the village at Maurice River Cove. Port Norris is literally a landing place and depot for oysters, and nearly all of its inhabitants are engaged in the oyster trade. There has been during the season of 1875 and 1876 an average of ten car-loads of oysters shipped from Port Norris weekly.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the arrival of the railroad and the growth of the oyster industry, Port Norris's population more than tripled by the end of the century. At this point, more than 900 men and women were engaged in the oyster business.<sup>6</sup>

Though records on the oyster industry are few, it is clear that the building boom in Port Norris began with the arrival of the railroad. For example, the *Millville Republican* reported on 11 April 1872 that several citizens had purchased a steam-powered sawmill that was being erected next to their lumber yard. Simultaneously, 14 houses and a new hotel were under construction, while plans were being pushed to build a new Methodist Church. Initial the railroad was to have terminated in Port Norris, but it was quickly decided to save the additional handling by connecting the railroad directly to the waterfront. This spur had already been constructed by 1876 when it appeared on the Stewart *Atlas* plate for Port Norris.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that the initial parts of the docks and packing houses were underway shortly afterwards. With the advent of low cost ice-machinery after 1890, refrigerated, shucked oysters became the standard of the oystering industry.<sup>8</sup>

The opportunity presented by refrigeration for shipping shucked and packed oysters enlarged the regional oyster industry by creating new groups of jobs for shuckers and packers, in addition to the existing work on the fleet. This in turn brought new population groups, including blacks who

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worked as shuckers and packers in the oystering business and Italian farmers who worked in the land-based agriculture. They were both reflected in new churches, an African Methodist Episcopal church that was built on Main Street and has since been moved to Memorial Street, and the small St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church that was built at the west end of Main Street. With the subsequent changes to the community, these are the principal landmarks of the early 20th century boom.

Deeds provide clues about the construction of the docks and the impetus for their construction. Most of the marsh land was held by the Robbins family who had been early settlers of the region. Sales are recorded in the 1870s and 1880s. In the latter decade this presumably reflected purchases to extend earlier docks as the industry grew.<sup>9</sup> With the railroad holding the right-of-way, sales were for the production buildings that lined the railroads. The shippers retained these holdings until after World War II, when the owners of the docks partitioned their shares, beginning a process of change.

The arrival of the railroad ultimately proved a mixed blessing. Within a generation, the investment in equipment and staff made the shippers dependent on the railroads. In addition, the perishable nature of shucked oysters gave the railroads significantly greater leverage than when oysters were shipped in their shells. When the railroads began charging higher prices for shipping, the shippers formed an association to rebalance the situation. Organized along the lines of the large business combines of the turn of the century, the Maurice River Cove Oyster Shippers Association worked to "protect trade by adjusting differences among the members, spreading reliable commercial intelligence, [and] protecting them against the unlawful action by carriers" (in other words price-fixing, to ensure that urban retailers and markets would not lower prices).<sup>10</sup>

Many of the members of the Maurice River Cove Oyster Shippers Association are discussed in *The Cumberland County Biographical Review*. The origins of the links between agriculture and aquaculture are apparent in the agricultural roots of many of the oystermen. Examples of the link between farming and agriculture include Peter Camblos Cosier, who became the principal oyster shipper in the country, sending three to five car-loads of oysters per day to Kansas City, Baltimore and New York. His father had been an oyster boat skipper before settling into farming at nearby Newport. Cosier purchased several vessels; in the summer when oystering was slow, he developed a large tomato canning business that employed 150 people and packed

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nearly a million cans of tomatoes a year.<sup>11</sup> Cosier became the head of the "Riparian Association" that attempted to purchase and control the oyster beds from Fortescue to Hawks Nest.

Cosier's contemporary from an early family in Port Norris was Henry S. Robbins, who also claimed to be the "largest oyster planter in this section of New Jersey." With his father, who was both a farmer and an oyster seeder, Henry Robbins developed a system of acquiring beds and planting for three years before building a new boat to work the area. By 1896, he owned six boats. Robert Taylor Lore, another son of a farmer from Newport, began oystering in 1860 and by 1895 owned five boats with his own oyster establishment at 518 south Water Street in Philadelphia. Thus, in the decade of the 1890s, oystering was the royal road to success in Port Norris -- but it depended on a peculiar mix of the initiative of a farmer and the daring and originality of the seaman.

The onslaught of the dermo and MSX parasites in Delaware Bay in the 1950s led to the collapse of the oyster industry causing an economic decline in the Port Norris region.<sup>12</sup> Harvests have declined and in many years been prevented, reducing or entirely eliminating work. However, docks, wharves, and vessels that relate to the oyster trade and maritime life survive in the community, reminders of its origins and its history. The buildings of Bivalve have proved to be extremely fragile, succumbing to flooding, harsh weather, and the difficulty of maintaining wood structures in an era of low income. Few of the town's residential buildings and almost none of its institutional and civic buildings survive.

Despite these losses, the Port Norris region contains numerous structures that can be shown to relate to the separate and distinct maritime community of the lower Delaware. It was as important as the better-known Chesapeake and New England communities -- but, because it has not become a resort, it has not become as well-known. This maritime community developed along the Cohansey and the Maurice River basins, and included other villages such as Fortesque to the south and Leesburg, Dorchester, and Mauricetown along the Maurice River.

Notes

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1. It is interesting that Peter Kalm, the 18th century Swedish traveler, mentions the quality of the local oyster at each of the northern centers of population that he visits, including the Delaware Bay and the Long Island sound areas. Peter Kalm, *Travels in North America* (Warrington, 1770; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1989), pp. 90, 125, 577.
2. Thomas Gordon, *Gazetteer of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton. 1834), p. 220.
3. For a brief history of the early oyster business see Lucius Q. C. Elmer, *History of the Early Settlement and Progress of Cumberland County, New Jersey* (Bridgeton, NJ: George F. Nixon, 1869), p. 76.
4. Histories of many of the ships made in Maurice River ports are included in Margaret Mints and Alex Ogden, *Man, the Sea and Industry: A History of Life on the Delaware Bay from 1492 to 1992* (Port Norris, NJ: privately printed, 1992).
5. (Philadelphia: 1876), p. vii and plate 38. In addition a business directory of Commercial Township lists the occupations of many of the residents, p. 45.
6. The population data is from the *Cumberland County Biographical Review* (Chicago, 1895), pp. 174-6. The size of the community at the end of the oystering boom is indicated in Sanborn Map Co. *Sanborn Atlas of Port Norris and Bivalve* (New York, 1920).
7. pl. 38.
8. The great ice-shortage of 1890 occurred because of a mild winter, resulting in a huge boom in the artificial refrigeration industry. See George E. Thomas, Ph.D. "York Manufacturing Company, York, PA," HABS documentation, 1994.
9. See Roger Allen vol. 1816 p. 59; vol. 600 p. 42, which describes a frame oyster shed and Wharf, with the wharf line established by riparian commission; this in turn goes back via a series of deeds to vol. 182, p. 105 (25 June 1886), and to vol. 165, p. 552 (12 February 1882). A large tract of 2700 feet along the water was sold by George Robbins to the Cumberland and Maurice River Railroad vol.1 182 p. 105 (25 June 1886); Robbins had sold a similar tract to the Union Oyster Company of Baltimore, MD, vol. 166, p. 380

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(5 June 1882). These sales marked the acquisition of the original oyster docks and right of way to the railroads and probably marked the moment when the present buildings were constructed.

10. The Maurice River Cover Oyster Association minutes and by-laws are recorded in pp. 247-251, (2 April 1894), Volume B of the Corporations records, Record Room of the Cumberland County Courthouse, Bridgeton, New Jersey (hereafter Volume B). The members, including Peter Cosier, Clarence Robbins, Robert and Luther Bateman all operated packing houses on the docks.

11. *Cumberland County Biographical Review*, pp. 174-6.

12. Mints and Ogden, p. 114-115.

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Primary Property types:

Oyster Packing Houses:

The primary building type of the Historic Marine and Architectural Resources of the Maurice River Cove is a hybrid building that forms a transition between water and land, and includes dock portions as well as the packing and storage houses. These buildings are located on the water's edge, and are typically built on pilings. Many of the buildings share features common to south Jersey construction including heavy timber framing with structural plank skins. The planks were nailed vertically and covered with wood battens as is still apparent in sections of the dock building. Presumably this system can be found on other buildings but it is concealed by asphalt shingle, aluminum siding and other modern surface materials.

Most of the Oyster Packing Houses were built in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries. The existing building primarily dates from the second or mature period of the oyster industry after 1876, though portions, such as the docks may be earlier. They are uniformly utilitarian in character, accounting for their visual interest.

Significance: The Oyster Packing Houses are the principal surviving remnants of the oyster industry which thrived in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century. Here oysters were off-loaded from boats, shucked, packed, and shipped and thus were the focus of the maritime trades which developed the Maurice River Cove. The Oyster Packing Houses principally meet Criterion C of the National Register, reflecting a significant building type. These served the purposes of linking the maritime trade to the land -- in wharves, shucking and packing houses, storage facilities and rail platforms.

Registration Requirements: The buildings of historic interest are those from before the Depression, which were uniformly of wood construction, and continue Victorian construction systems. These utilitarian permanent structures will meet registration requirements as they represent the work-places and typical wood frame construction of the pre-1930 era and if they remain at or near their original maritime site, in a marine setting. The resources should be entirely intact as an independent structure -- though adjacent or ancillary structures such as railroad tracks and platforms need not have survived.

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Ship Maintenance Structures:

A second group of buildings relating to the maritime theme of the Maurice River Cove are those devoted to the construction and maintenance of the vessels which plied the waters, including ship yards, sail lofts, and ship chandleries. Like the Oyster Packing Houses, these are typically rough, utilitarian structures that are built of wood frame on pilings or other simple foundations. Like the oyster packing houses, they are located on or near the water, though it was possible for several of the businesses, including the sail lofts, to be located back from the water but within the port area. Buildings that survive date from the late 19th and early twentieth centuries. With the notable exception of the late 19th century Newcomb Chandlery in Bivalve, whose low, wood-shaked gambrel roof recalls the Colonial Revival, the maritime structures are functionally expressive, with rooms and heights determined by the requirement of use, whether in the docks and adjacent packing houses or the tall sail lofts. With few exceptions, all of the surviving structures are in poor condition, though many exhibit a high degree of integrity related to their lack of use as two generations of oyster parasites have reduced the maritime economy.

Significance: The shipyards, sail lofts, and ships chandleries were the facilities that supported the local Maurice River maritime trades and continued the oldest activities of the port, including shipbuilding and coastal shipping. Thus, shipyards pre-dated the packing houses - but little survives of the original shipyard structures. By the 1870s, as the port shifted to an almost total dependence on oystering, the yards served the specialized requirements of that industry. Because the industry continued to use wood sailing vessels well into the twentieth century, the surviving portions of the ship yards reflect the mature oystering industry of the post 1876 era. They meet criterion C as a significant example of a rare and distinctive building type.

Registration Requirements: Buildings of historic interest are those from before the Depression, of wood construction, and which continue the use of Victorian construction systems. These utilitarian, permanent structures will meet registration requirements as they represent the work-places and typical wood frame construction of the pre-1930 era and if they remain at or near their original maritime site, in a marine setting. The resources should be entirely intact as an independent structure -- though adjacent or ancillary structures such as marine railroads and docks need not have survived.

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Vessels:

The third group of structures that are part of the Port Norris region maritime heritage are the vessels, many of which remain in the active oyster and fishing fleet, though some travel up and down the coast. While most have been converted from sail to diesel power, and have lost the masts, spars, sheets, and other equipment related to sail power, they remain important artifacts of the lower Delaware Bay. As noted above, many are of 19th and early 20th century origins, and more than a few have been built within a few miles of Port Norris. These are being studied by Michael Chiarrapa, Ph.D. as a part of the Coastal Heritage Trail project. In addition, many of the surviving historic boats are listed by Margaret Mints in *Man, the Sea and Industry* (1992). The later regional boats are characterized by a distinctive spoon bow shape, and share common characteristics of hull breadth and stern shape. Most are well documented, so that it would be possible to add an inventory of known vessels. Further, these are also represented by the archaeological remains of hulls that are scattered around the area in various ditches and banks where they were hauled and ultimately abandoned.

Significance: The lower Delaware Bay developed its own maritime boats that were as distinctive as the log-canoes of the Chesapeake, or the deep-hulled schooners of the Penobscot River in Maine. They tended to be broad and flat in hull shape to handle the coastal waters, but were large enough to handle the weather and size of the Bay. Because of scarcity and continuing losses, determining criteria for significance reflect known Maurice River origins and use within the oyster and coastal trading industry. A few vessels date from the first period of the Maurice River maritime activity before 1876, while the majority of survivors date from the later era when the oyster industry was at its peak in the early 20th century. These are primarily covered by Criterion C as a significant example of a distinctive ship building type.

Registration Requirements: Vessels should have a known Maurice River provenance, and must remain wooden-hulled and repairable. Archaeological sites are not eligible because they are no longer a part of the operating fleet and because their sites usually were not selected for a reason, but are merely the result of happenstance.





