

CH-789

1935

Rock Point Oyster Shucking House

Rock Point

Private

Although in ruinous condition, the Rock Point Oyster Packing House is one of the few documented structures associated with the commercial seafood packing industry in Charles County. Commercial seafood was an important industry that began to appear in Southern Maryland during the 1870s and 1880s. Oysters in particular, along with shad and herring, were important exports in Southern Maryland during the late 19th century. The Rock Point Oyster Shucking House consists of a 1 ½ story concrete block structure erected in 1935 on a narrow peninsula of land extending from the north shore of Neale Sound near the mouth of the Wicomico River. The site consists of just under 2 acres with a long pier extending to the west into Neale Sound. The building has a side-gable orientation and is divided into three main areas, correlating with different stages in the oyster canning process. The Rock Point Oyster Packing House suffered extensive structural damage due to Hurricane Isabel in 2003.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-789

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Rock Point Oyster Packing House

other

2. Location

street and number 16213 Cedar Lane not for publication

city, town Rock Point vicinity

county Charles

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Save the Seed Ministry, Inc.

street and number PO Box 1976 telephone 301-893-1911

city, town Waldorf state MD zip code 20602-1976

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Charles County Courthouse tax map and parcel: 89 p.146

city, town La Plata liber 2247 folio 102

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- Contributing Resource in National Register District
- Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
- Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Recorded by HABS/HAER
- Historic Structure Report or Research Report
- Other

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function	Resource Count	
			Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense		
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic		
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education		
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	1	
		<input type="checkbox"/> government		
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care		
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry		
		<input type="checkbox"/> landscape		
		<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture		
		<input type="checkbox"/> religion		
		<input type="checkbox"/> social		
		<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
		<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress		
		<input type="checkbox"/> unknown		
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use		
		<input type="checkbox"/> other:		
			Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory	
			0	

7. Description

Inventory No. CH-789

Condition

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ruins |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> altered |
-

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The Rock Point Oyster Packing House suffered extensive structural damage due to Hurricane Isabel in 2003. The site consists of a 1 1/2 story concrete block structure erected in 1935 on a narrow peninsula of land extending from the north shore of Neale Sound near the mouth of the Wicomico River. The site consists of just under 2 acres with a long pier extending to the west into Neale Sound. At the end of the pier is a large wench presumably used to unload cargo from the commercial oyster boats. The building has a side-gable orientation with a single large shed-roof dormer on the east and west elevations. Galvanized metal covers the roof and exposed rafters.

As a result of the hurricane, the entire west wall was demolished, limiting the extent of fieldwork. The interior was divided into three main sections. The center room was the largest and clearly included work spaces for shucking oysters. The interior consists of poured concrete floors and work tables supported by metal posts. A continuous concrete slab at waist level served as workspace for shuckers and presumably allowed for six or more stations lighted by a series of six 2-light windows above. This configuration may have been mirrored on the opposite wall. Additional work surfaces were found on interior walls and between two structural columns in the center of the room. Simple wooden shelves rising from the floor stood in the southeast corner and another stood on the northeast corner. The interior walls as well as the ceiling and rafters were parged and whitewashed.

The northernmost room was probably used for cleaning and sorting oysters after being unloaded. This room was divided into two, each of which was accessible by a doorway to the outside. The smaller of the two received the most extensive damage from Hurricane Isabel however, evidence of plumbing in a shed addition is present. This room was not whitewashed. The opposite room included three additional windows identical to the bay of windows in the shucking room. The southernmost room stood furthest from the dock and presumably was used to store the packaged oysters, or may have been used as a packing room. This room lacked the bank of windows on the east wall and there was no visible evidence of fenestration on the remaining rooms.

8. Significance

Inventory No. CH-789

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> maritime industry	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

Specific dates 1935 **Architect/Builder** unknown

Construction dates 1935

Evaluation for:

National Register Maryland Register not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance reports, complete evaluation on a DOE Form - see manual.)

Although in ruinous condition, the Rock Point Oyster Packing House is one of the few documented structures associated with the commercial seafood packing industry in Charles County. Commercial seafood was an important industry that began to appear in Southern Maryland during the 1870s and 1880s. Oysters in particular, along with shad and herring, were important exports in Southern Maryland during the late 19th century. At least three large oyster bottoms were located off of Charles County's shoreline. These included Cobb Island Bar, Swan Point Bar, Kettle Bottom Shoals and Old Farm Bar, the largest in the area between Popes Creek and the Kettle Bottom Channel. Urban growth throughout the nation stimulated the growth of the packing industry in Baltimore. Improved rail transportation, combined with improvements in food preservation, meant for the first time canned goods could now follow rail lines across the county and into the frontier.

After the Civil War, the oyster grounds and fisheries to the north were largely depleted and many watermen from the North turned their efforts to the Chesapeake Bay. Between 1872-1892, Maryland on average produced over 10 million bushels per year. The harvest of 1884-85 brought in 15 million bushels, the highest yield before and since, and represented 1/3 of the worldwide oyster harvest during that year. The agricultural depression of the post-war years encouraged many to abandon or supplement farming with seafood. According to the 1880 census, 120 people claimed to be either a fisherman, sailor or oysterman. Roughly half were oystermen.

The enormous fortunes at stake in the oyster industry, combined with over harvesting and declining yields, led to the infamous Oyster Wars of the late 19th century. Competition between oystermen was fierce and at times led to violence. Oystermen from the Northern Neck of Virginia, and the Maryland and Virginia Eastern Shore began dredging local oyster grounds, stiffening yields of local watermen. Labor was also a problem and many accounts exist of immigrants being "shanghaied" during the times of peak harvests. Some were brutally treated. Other accounts tell of workers not being compensated, abandoned or thrown overboard. Maryland's conservation commissioner, Swepson Earle stated in the early twentieth century that "the toughest of tough places on the Chesapeake in the 1890's was Rock Point on the Potomac River at the mouth of the Wicomico...Three killings a week created no civic resentment, while many weeks during the oyster season marked the departure from this life of as many as five or six men." Although it is difficult to judge just how overstated this may have been, in 1905 several highly publicized shoot-outs are known to have occurred off of the Cobb Neck Bar.

As a result of the railroad, Maryland became the leading state for packing oysters as well as a variety of farm produce including tomatoes. In Baltimore, canning was second only to garment-making. In 1880 Baltimore contributed 1/3 of all canning done in the United States. Along the Patuxent River, Benedict rivaled Solomon's Island in the number of oyster packing houses. Between 1900 and 1920 there were four companies in operation. Rock Point is known to have had at least four packing houses. During World War II, local watermen discovered a large oyster strike on Swann Point Bar. After the poor harvests and low prices of the early 20th century, these large, white flavorful oysters prompted a resurgence in the oyster industry along with increased hostility

9. Major Bibliographical References

Inventory No. CH-789

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property 1.9

Acreage of historical setting 1.9

Quadrangle name Rock Point

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The site is associated with Charles County property tax map 89, parcel 146.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cathy Hardy/ Historic Sites Surveyor

organization Charles County Planning

date 12/20/2003

street and number 200 Baltimore Street

telephone 301-396-5815

city or town La Plata

state MD zip code 20646

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
DHCD/DHCP
100 Community Place
Crownsville MD 21032
410-514-7600

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of
Historic Properties For

Inventory No CH-789

Name Rock Point Oyster Packing House

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 1

between competing Virginia and Maryland oystermen and officials.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-789

Section 9 Page 1

Rock Point Oyster Packing House
name of property
Charles County, MD
county and state

Major Bibliographic References:

Brown, Jack D., et al. *Charles County, Maryland, A History*.
Charles County Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

Charles County Land Records, Charles County Courthouse, LaPlata, Maryland.

Hardy, Cathy Currey. "Phase III Final Report Charles County Historic Sites Survey."
Charles County Planning. July 2002.

KCI Technologies, Inc. *Draft--Historic Context For the U.S. 301 Southern Corridor
Transportation Study*. August 1996.

Klapthor, Margaret Brown. *The History of Charles County, Maryland*.
LaPlata, MD: Charles County Tercentenary, Inc., 1958.

Lewis, J. Frank & Company. *The Maryland Directory*. 1880. Baltimore

Tilp, Frederick. *This Was Potomac River*. Frederick Tilp, 1978.

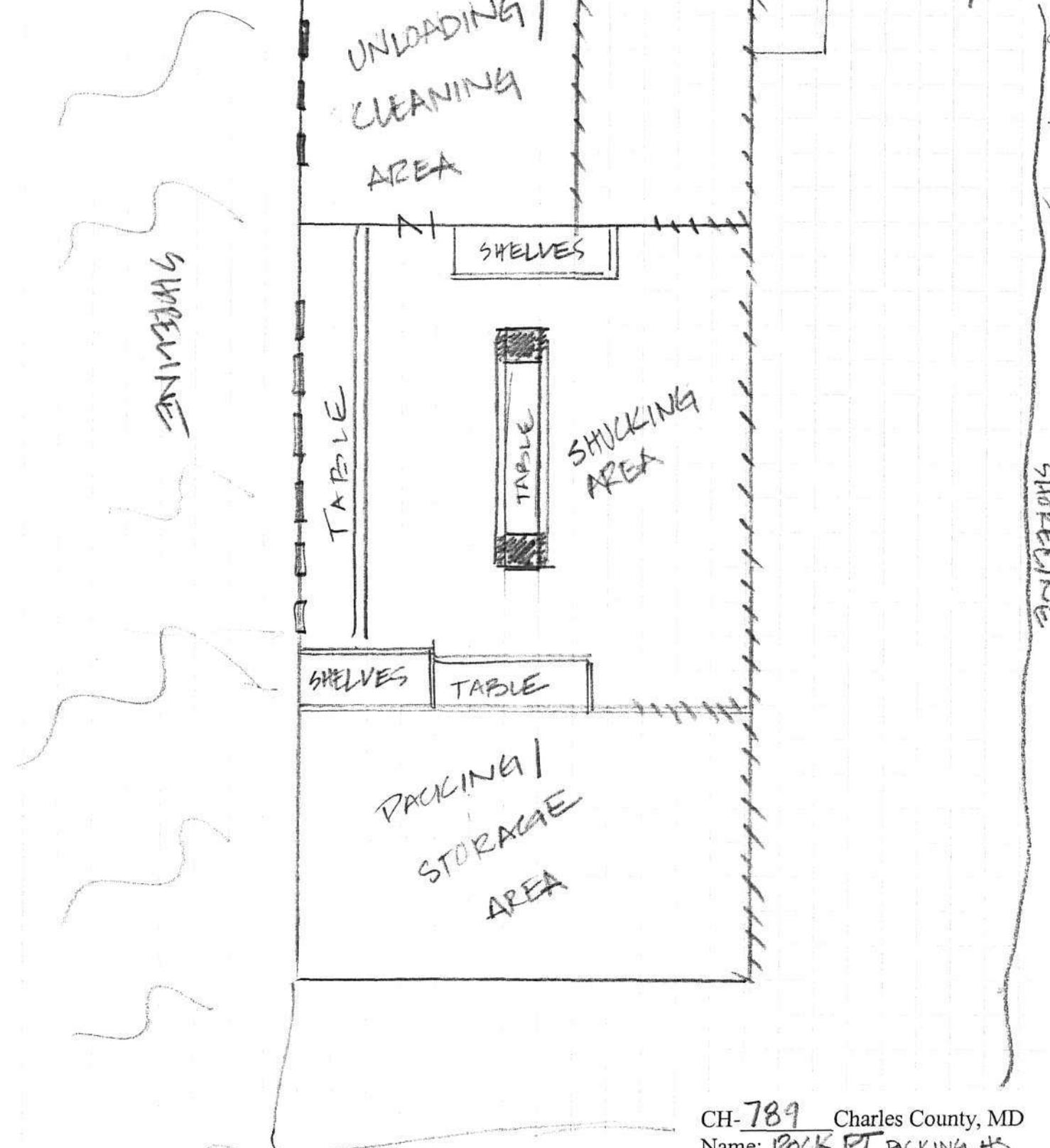
Maps

Griffith, Dennis. *Map of the State of Maryland Laid down from an actual Survey of all the
principal Waters, public Roads, and Divisions of the Counties therein....* Philadelphia, PA: J.
Tallance, Engraver, June 6, 1795.

Martenet, Simon J. *Martenet's Map of Maryland and the District of Columbia*. Baltimore, MD:
Simon J. Martenet, C.E., 1865; revised 1885.

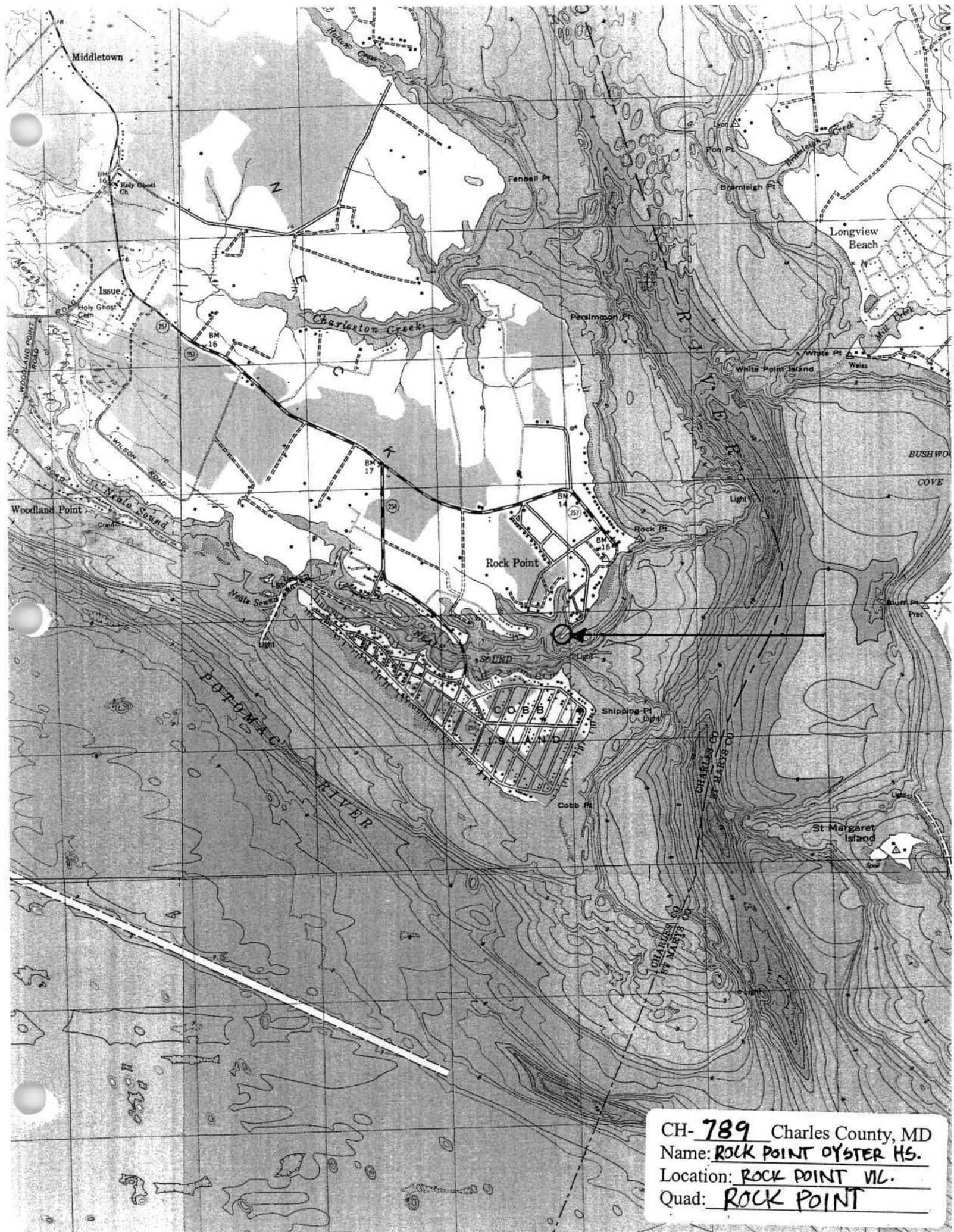
PIER
←

DEMOLISHED
AT TIME OF
SURVEY



SHORELINES

CH-789 Charles County, MD
Name: ROCK PT PACKING HS
Location: ROLL POINT MD
Quad: ROLL POINT



CH- 789 Charles County, MD
Name: ROCK POINT OYSTER HS.
Location: ROCK POINT VI.
Quad: ROCK POINT



CH 789

ROCK POINT OYSTER SHUCKERS HOUSE

ROCK POINT, MD

C. HARDY

11/2003

MD SAPS

LOOKING S

lot 4



CH 789
ROCK POINT OYSTER SHUCKERS HOUSE

ROCK POINT, MD

C. HARPY

11/2003

MD SHPO

LOOKING S

2004



CH-789

ROCK POINT OYSTER SHUCKERS HOUSE

ROCK POINT, MD

C. HARRY

11/2003

MD SHPO

LOOKING E

30P4



CH-789

ROCK POINT OYSTERS SHUCKERS HOUSE

ROCK POINT, MP

C. HARDY

11/2003

INTERIOR, LOOKING N

4 OF 4