

T-1155  
Harrison Oyster Company  
Tilghman  
Private

1998

Although of recent construction and minimal architectural significance, the Harrison Oyster Company packinghouse is a simple frame structure that repeats in general form the utilitarian gable-roofed buildings erected in the early days of the oyster industry. A packinghouse has improved this Knapps Narrows location since the early twentieth century.

Captain Levin Harrison owned a bugeye and dredged for oysters with the help of his sons Levin and Peter. When he had a full load, he took them to Baltimore or Cambridge to sell. Captain Levin Harrison, Jr. bought a buyboat built by John B. Harrison, which he named the Ida May after his mother. He believed that this would be an easier way to make a living than dredging. He would buy oysters for two or three days until he had a full load and then take two or three days to run them to markets in Baltimore and Crisfield. His son, Captain Levin "Buddy" Harrison III, worked in the buyboat during high school and after he graduated from the University of Maryland. This was hard work in the winter months, going up and down the Bay with a boat overloaded with oysters, especially when the bow iced up. Captain Buddy remembers having to go up to the bow with a hatchet to chop off the ice as it formed. He decided that this was too dangerous and borrowed a truck in the late 1950s from George Harrison of the Tilghman Packing Company. He paid Harrison ten cents a bushel on every bushel he transported. Buddy Harrison found that he could pay ten cents a bushel more than his father to watermen at the wharf, deliver a truckload of oysters overnight and be back the next day for more.

In 1966 Captain Buddy Harrison saw an opportunity to buy a shucking plant when the Tilghman Packing Company stopped packing oysters to concentrate on frozen food. The skilled labor for a shucking business was still in place, so he established the Harrison Oyster Company on Tilghman Island, opening for business in 1967. At that time he could buy 1000 to 4000 bushels of oysters a day. In 1977 the company employed 70 people.

Despite the large supplies of oysters during the 1960s and 1970s, the bottom dropped out of the oyster business in the early 1980s with a sharp decline in the harvests. The oyster business fluctuated over the next twenty years, and the Harrisons began reducing its trucking fleet. In 1998 the bridge at Knapps Narrows was replaced and the Harrison Oyster Company's packinghouse was torn down and replaced by a new one sited farther down the narrows. The *2000 Maryland/DC Manufacturers Directory* listed Harrison Oysters, Inc. with 30 employees processing and packaging oysters and wholesale fish. In the 2001-2002 oyster season, the catch has dropped to a point where the business can supply Capt. Harrison's Chesapeake House Restaurant on Tilghman Island, and send some orders to the mid-West for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

# Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. T-1155

## 1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Harrison Oyster Company

other \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street and number Tilghman Island Road      not for publication

city, town Tilghman Island      vicinity

county Talbot

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

name Levin and Roberta Harrison

street and number P. O. Box J telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city, town Tilghman state Maryland zip code 21671

## 4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Talbot County Clerk of Court liber 414 folio 337

city, town Easton tax map 441 tax parcel 25 tax ID number 5-180007

## 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 at MHT  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function	Resource Count	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	<u>1</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use	<u>1</u> Total
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:	

**Number of Contributing Resources  
previously listed in the Inventory**  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

Inventory No. T-1155

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### Condition

excellent       deteriorated  
 good             ruins  
 fair               altered

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

The Harrison Oyster Company is located on Tilghman Island at Knapps Narrows near the Tilghman Island bridge in Talbot County, Maryland. The single-story frame packinghouse faces north and the narrows with the principal roof oriented on a north/south axis.

Built in 1998, the frame packinghouse is supported on a plain concrete block foundation, and the exterior is clad with T-111 siding. The oyster house has a two-story, gable-roofed front section built atop the gable roofed main block. A deck stretches across the front of the packinghouse and is supported by hole-set posts driven in the oyster shell filled lot. A bulkhead stretches across the front of the property.

The north gable-front is a two-story elevation with a double-door entrance filling the east bay, and a paired set of single-pane sash windows along with a single width door opening piercing the west side of the first floor. The double door entrance is the main cargo access into the shucking room along with access to a cooler. The second story is defined by a series of three single-pane sash windows and a door opening in the westernmost bay. The door is not accessible from the ground level. The medium pitched roof is covered with asphalt shingles, and the edge of the roof is finished with a plain bargeboard. Piercing the rear (south) wall of the two-story section are two small sized one-over-one sash windows.

The west side of the packinghouse is single-story wall surface pierced by a single, partially glazed door opening. The west wall of the second story room is marked by a single one-over-one sash window. The east wall, on the other hand, is defined by a series of high single-pane sash windows of smaller dimension than normal sash. The windows are set higher on the wall surface so that they are raised above an interior counter where the shuckers stand. The base of the roof is finished with a plain boxed cornice. The southeast corner of the shucking house is an open porch bay for unloading oysters, and the corner porch shelters a double door opening.

The interior is a plainly finished space with wallboard walls and a concrete floor.

## 8. Significance

Inventory No. T-1155

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 type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

### Specific dates

### Architect/Builder

Construction dates 1998

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 projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

Although of recent construction and minimal architectural significance, the Harrison Oyster Company packinghouse is a simple frame structure that repeats in general form the utilitarian gable-roofed buildings erected in the early days of the oyster industry. In many cases a small second floor room was erected atop the main packinghouse for an office or a place in which someone roomed overnight.

### HISTORY AND SUPPORT

Captain Levin Harrison owned a bugeye and dredged for oysters with the help of his sons Levin and Peter. When he had a full load, he took them to Baltimore or Cambridge to sell. Captain Levin Harrison, Jr. brought a buyboat built by John B. Harrison which he named the Ida May after his mother. He believed that this would be an easier way to make a living than dredging. He would buy oysters for two or three days until he had a full load and then take two or three days to run them to markets in Baltimore and Crisfield. His son, Captain Levin "Buddy" Harrison III, worked on the buyboat during high school and after he graduated from the University of Maryland. This was hard work in the winter months, going up and down the Bay with a boat overloaded with oysters, especially when the bow iced up. Captain Buddy remembers having to go up to the bow with a hatchet to chop off the ice as it formed. He decided that this was too dangerous and borrowed a truck in the late 1950s from George Harrison of the Tilghman Packing Company. He paid Harrison ten cents a bushel on every bushel he transported. Buddy Harrison found that he could pay ten cents a bushel more than his father to watermen at the wharf, deliver a truckload of oysters overnight and be back the next day for more. The next year he bought his own truck and then his father bought a second truck. He could off-load the oysters from the buyboat and truck them to Baltimore rather than taking them by boat. This worked so well that in the early 1960s they bought a tractor trailer truck to take care of the expanding business.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Levin F. Harrison III, Tilghman, Maryland, January 17, 2002.

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Name Harrison Oyster Company  
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 1

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In 1966 Captain Buddy Harrison saw an opportunity to buy a shucking plant when the Tilghman Packing Company stopped packing oysters to concentrate on frozen food. The skilled labor for a shucking business was still there, so he established the Harrison Oyster Company on Tilghman Island, opening for business in 1967. At that time he could buy 1000 to 4000 bushels of oysters a day. He kept what he needed for shucking and sold the rest to other packing houses in Maryland and Virginia. The company packed under the "Harrison" brand and under the "B & L" brand for brokers Bailey and Langrall in Bivalve. In the 1969-70 season, the Chicago Health Department accused Chesapeake Bay oyster packers of watering oysters. This scared local packers who started packing drier oysters.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1970s, faced with more oysters than he could sell, Harrison contracted with Campbell's Soup in Virginia to supply a certain amount of oysters per month for oyster stew, and sent tractor trailer loads of oysters to Virginia in the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1977 the company employed 70 people.<sup>3</sup> The bottom dropped out of the oyster business in the early 1980s with a sharp decline in the oyster harvests. Harrison had to give up the soup contract and in 1983 Harrison employed only 21 people.<sup>4</sup> The soup companies on the Chesapeake Bay closed. In 1986 the company purchased oysters from six skipjacks and 80 tong boats at their packinghouse on Knapps Narrows next to the Knapps Narrows bridge, and employed up to 28 shuckers during the peak season.

The oyster business fluctuated over the next twenty years, and Harrison began to reduce its trucking fleet. Harrison sold shucked oysters as far west as Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and in Minnesota, Nebraska, Iowa and Ohio, where there was little competition and strong demand for the product.<sup>5</sup> A truck holding as much as 2000 gallons would stop first in Pittsburg with a delivery and then continue west. This could be a difficult run in winter months. The trucks came back empty. At one time, they tried hauling meat back from Chicago during a truckers strike. The truck returned shot full of holes, and they did not try that again.<sup>6</sup>

In 1998, the bridge at Knapps Narrows was replaced and the Harrison Oyster Company's packinghouse was torn down and replaced by a new one farther down the narrows. The *2000 Maryland/DC Manufacturers Directory* listed Harrison Oysters, Inc. with 30 employees processing and packaging oysters and wholesale fish.<sup>7</sup> In the 2001-2002 oyster season, the catch has dropped to a point where the business can supply Capt. Harrison's Chesapeake House Restaurant on Tilghman Island, and

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Levin F. Harrison III, Tilghman, Maryland, January 17, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> *Directory of Maryland Manufacturers 1977-78*, Maryland Department of Economic and Community Development, p. 228.

<sup>4</sup> *Directory of Maryland Manufacturers 1983-84*, Maryland Department of Economic and Community Development, p. 294.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Ehlen, "The Venerable Oyster," *Maryland Magazine*, Autumn 1983, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Levin F. Harrison III, Tilghman, January 17, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> *2000 Maryland/DC Manufacturers Directory*, p. 368.

# Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Name Harrison Oyster Company  
**Continuation Sheet**

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send some orders to the mid-west for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Any extra are sent to the wholesale fish market in Jessup, Maryland.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Levin F. Harrison III, Tilghman, Maryland, January 17, 2002.

**Maryland Historical Trust**  
**Maryland Inventory of**  
**Historic Properties Form**

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Name Harrison Oyster Company  
**Continuation Sheet**

Number 8 Page 3

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Levin and Roberta Harrison  
P. O. Box J  
Tilghman, Maryland

Map 441, Parcel 25

414/337 Orem N. Lowery & Others

to

9/21/1966 Levin F. Harrison III and Roberta Harrison

Parcel 1- 63/100s of an acre lying and being on Tilghman Island...including all of the land, marsh, and accretions thereunto formed or made, together with the shell pile, buildings, bulkheads, etc.  
Parcel 2-made land and marsh- 1 5/16 acres  
Parcel 3-area of land unclear

367/592 Orem N. Lowery and Walter Lowery, executors of Henry Clay Lowery

to

12/20/1960 Orem N. Lowery and others

269/6 Lillian B. Rude, et al

to

Henry Clay Lowery and wife  
Parcel 3

**Maryland Historical Trust**  
**Maryland Inventory of**  
**Historic Properties Form**

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Name Harrison Oyster Company  
**Continuation Sheet**

Number 8 Page 4

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263/18

Lillian B. Rude, et al

to

Henry Clay Lowery & Margaret A. Lowery  
Parcels 1 and 2

213/371

Lawrence Rude

to

3/15/1938

Lillian B. Rude  
R. Eugene Rude ½ interest  
Carvel H. Rude

Ground, marsh, & oyster shell pile, 63/100ths of an acre, together with  
a part of the accretion of marsh since formed...

127/4

Charles H. Sinclair

to

11/7/1896

Lawrence Rude  
One acre and 21 ¼ perches

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Interview with Captain Levin F. Harrison III, Tighman, Maryland, January 17, 2002.

Land Records of Talbot County, various volumes, Easton, Maryland.

(For a full listing of the resources consulted see footnotes)

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of surveyed property 2.26 acres  
Acreage of historical setting 2 +/- acres  
Quadrangle name Tilghman Island, Maryland

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The metes and bounds of this property are coincidental with the current boundary of the lot.

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## 11. Form Prepared by

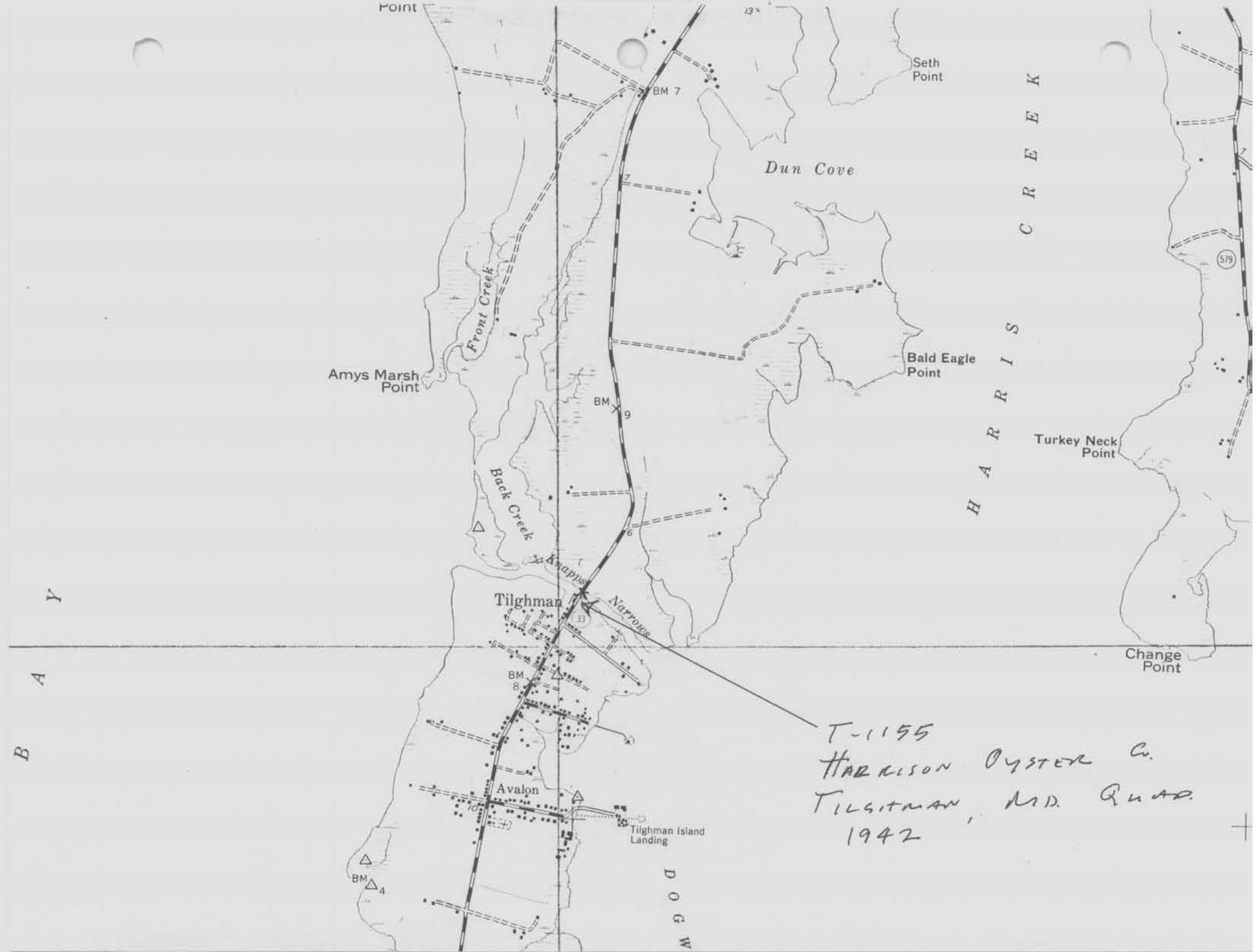
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name/title	Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian and Virginia Jenkins, Business Historian, CBMM		
organization	Private Consultants	date	1/17/2002
street & number	P. O. Box 5	telephone	410-651-1094
city or town	Westover	state	Maryland 21871

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 21032-2023  
410-514-7600



Amy's Marsh Point

Seth Point

Dun Cove

Bald Eagle Point

Turkey Neck Point

Front Creek

Back Creek

HARRIS CREEK

Tilghman

Narrows

Change Point

Avalon

Tilghman Island Landing

T-1155  
HARRISON OYSTER C.  
TILGHMAN, MD. QUAD  
1942

BM 4

BM 9

BM 7

BM 8

Y

A

B

DOG W

579



T-1155

HARRISON OYSTER COMPANY PACKING HOUSE

TILGHMAN, TALBOT Co., MD.

NORTHWEST ELEVATION

1/2012, PAUL TOWNET, PHOTOGRAPHER

VER./MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

1 OF 7



T-1155

HARRISON OYSTER COMPANY PACKINGHOUSE

TILGHMAN, TALBOT C., MD

NORTHWEST ELEVATION

1/2002, PAUL TOWERS, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEG./NO. HISTORICAL TRUST

1 OF 1



T-1155

HARRISON OYSTER COMPANY PACKING HOUSE

TILGHMAN, TALBOT Co. MD.

KNAPPS NARROWS AND NW CORNER OF  
THE HARRISON OYSTER Co.

1/2002, PAUL TOWART, PHOTOGRAPHER

3 OF 7



T-1155

HARRISON Oyster Co. PACKINGHOUSE

TILGHMAN, TALBOT Co., MD.

NORTHEAST ELEVATION

1/2002, PAUL TOWART, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEG./MS. HISTORICAL TRUST

4 of 6



T-1155

HARRISON OYSTER Co. PACKINGHOUSE

TILGHMAN, TALBOT Co., MD.

NORTHEAST ELEVATION

1/2002, PAUL TOWANT, PHOTOGRAPHER

NE, MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

5 of 7



T-1155

HARRISON OYSTER COMPANY PACKHOUSE

TILGHMAN, TALBOT CO, MD.

WEST ELEVATION

1/2002, PAUL TOWNSE, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEE./MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

6 of 7



T-1155

HARRISON OYSTER Co. PACKINGHOUSE

TILGAMAN, TALBOT Co, MD.

Southeast elevation

1/2002, PAUL TOWN, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEA/MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

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