

SHOAL HARBOR

Intersection of Port Monmouth Road and Main Street

Belford Vicinity

Monmouth County

New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1237

HABS
NJ
13-BELFD.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service

Northeast Region

Philadelphia Support Office

U.S. Custom House

200 Chestnut Street

Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SHOAL HARBOR

HABS
NJ
13-BELFD.V,
12
HABS No. NJ-1237

- Location: Intersection of Port Monmouth Road and Main Street, Belford vicinity,
Monmouth County, New Jersey
- U.S.G.S. Sandy Hook N.J.-N.Y. Quadrangle
UTM Coordinates: A: 18.578020.4476280
B: 18.577920.4475880
C: 18.577630.4475920
D: 18.577300.4476090
E: 18.577780.4476440
- Present Owner: Belford Seafood Cooperative, Inc.
Main Street, Belford
- Present Occupant: Belford Seafood Cooperative, Inc.
- Present Use: Cooperative fishing fleet
- Significance: The Shoal Harbor fishing community is one of the last remaining traditional fisheries in New Jersey and the last such community on Raritan Bay. The community is a distinctive, vernacular built environment constructed by its users and directly embodies the "baymen's" ethos. In the face of the inherent unpredictability of fishing as a profession, the fishermen have adapted their built environment to reflect this uncertainty, while simultaneously creating a continuity of methods and materials. Belford, historically the bay's principal finfishing port, retains the enduring "baying" tradition and exhibits the same basic methods and means of survival that accompanied the beginning of the commercial fishing industry in the 1870s. While the numbers, both of fish and of fishermen, have dwindled in the last thirty years, the tradition and physical evidence of the fisheries remain at Shoal Harbor.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. History of the Belford/Port Monmouth Area

a. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

During the late seventeenth century the lands which included the Shoal Harbor area were owned by Thomas Whitlock. "In 1687 it was noted that a 'driftway from Thomas Whitlock's ... to the King's highway in Middletown' was already in place" (Porter et al. 1994:18). This road, which connected Whitlock's lands with the village of Middletown to the south, probably followed the general course of either Belford Main Street or Wilson Avenue (Porter et al. 1994:18). The lands along its path were used for agriculture and for the exploitation of marine resources, and these uses would continue into the mid-nineteenth century. The extended Whitlock family, which came to include the locally-significant Seabrook and Wilson families, maintained a significant presence in this area into the twentieth century (Ellis 1885; Salter and Beekman 1887; Short and Ford Architects 1986; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:18). Until the mid-nineteenth century, the dominant structure in the present Port Monmouth/Belford area was the Whitlock/Seabrook House. This dwelling still stands on the north side of Port Monmouth Road, opposite the end of Wilson Avenue. A map produced during the American Revolution depicted this house at "shole Harbour" along with a roadway following the general course of Wilson Avenue (Lawrence n.d.). Other military maps produced during the war (see Hills 1781) showed the road following the course of Belford Main Street to the mouth of Shoal Harbor (now Comptons) Creek (Short and Ford Architects 1986; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:18).

b. Nineteenth Century

At the turn of the nineteenth century, lands at the bayshore at "shole Harbour" remained essentially undeveloped and isolated. However, a regular waterborne trade route to New York City was already well-established by small-scale entrepreneurs. From 1836 to 1849 Captain Thomas Morford was in command of the Comptons Creek packet sloops route to New York City. During Morford's time the packet company was reported to be the most profitable transportation company on the bayshore, accommodating both freight and passengers ("Recollections...":9-11). By 1851 development along Belford Main Street had begun south of the creek. At this time, Belford Main Street reached the bay along the eastern shore of the creek, in contrast to its present location on the west shore (Lightfoot 1851; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:19).

Just after mid-century, several modes of transportation transformed the character of the Shoal Harbor area. In 1853, the Port Monmouth Steamboat and Sloop Transportation Company was established to provide waterborne passenger and freight transport between Monmouth County and New York City. The company built a sizable pier at the end of Church Street that extended approximately 2,000 feet out into the bay to reach water deep enough for its boats. The company also built a waiting "Pavilion" for passengers and a hotel at the foot of the pier. The company's primary activity involved the shipment of agricultural produce to New York, but it also handled other forms of freight and transport of passengers to and from the resort areas on the Atlantic coast. This company was the first to put the name Port Monmouth into common usage. In 1855, the Port Monmouth Steamboat and Sloop Transportation Company was formally reorganized as the Port Monmouth Transportation Company, with its stated purpose continuing as before (Acts of the Seventy-Ninth Legislature of the State of New Jersey 1855:672-4; Ellis 1885:378, 544, 555; Salter and Beekman 1887:193-4; Leonard 1923:117; Lane 1939:214; Reussille 1975:17, 146; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:19).

The second transportation development at Shoal Harbor was the incorporation of the Port Monmouth and Middletown Plank Road Company in 1854. The mission of this company was to build a timber plank road to connect Port Monmouth with Leonardville Road at Chanceville (now New Monmouth) and the village of Middletown beyond. The northern terminus of this new road, which is now Church Street, was to be the Port Monmouth Steamboat and Sloop Transportation Company pier (Acts of the Seventy-Eighth Legislature of the State of New Jersey 1854:195-203). This roadway was one of just three plank roads that were built in Monmouth County (Ellis 1885:377-8,544; Salter and Beekman 1887:193; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:19).

The third and most important of the transportation developments that would alter the character of the Shoal Harbor area was constructed in 1854. In that year, the Raritan and Delaware Bay Railroad Company was incorporated to build a railroad between the Raritan Bay and the Delaware Bay. Construction on the Raritan and Delaware Bay Railroad began at Port Monmouth in 1856 and by 1860 both rail and associated steamboat operations were underway (Ellis 1885:544; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:19,20).

The arrival of the railroad spurred the development of the village of Port Monmouth. During the Civil War the rail facilities at Port Monmouth temporarily expanded as the rail line prospered through the handling of military freight; however, this prosperity did not endure past the end of the war. During the remainder of the nineteenth century, the rail-related activities, the marine transport lines, and the commencement of the commercial fishing industry supported the continued growth in the village of Port Monmouth and in what is now known as Belford (Porter et al. 1994:22).

Port Monmouth's marine transport activities were re-organized after the Civil War. One such re-organization was the establishment of the Middletown Transportation Company in 1866. The

company included Aaron Seabrook and his brother-in-law William V. Wilson among its incorporators and was assembled as a replacement for the old Port Monmouth Transportation Company. The original company's pier and pavilion at the head of the plank road were abandoned and passed into private ownership, while the company that had operated the plank road went bankrupt, allowing the roadway to become a public thoroughfare. The Middletown Transportation Company built a new steamboat dock on the west side of Comptons Creek at the northern end of what is now Belford Main Street, just west of the area presently occupied by the Belford Seafood Cooperative. "This new terminal facility can be viewed as the first of several elements that would lead to the development of Belford as a community distinct from Port Monmouth, although the two communities would operate largely as one community through the twentieth century" (Porter et al. 1994:25).

It was during the 1870s that the commercial fishing industry was established on the bayshore, bringing further growth to the Belford area and creating the base upon which present-day fishing operations at Shoal Harbor were built. Prior to this time, fishermen were often also farmers, and fishing was just one of several activities necessary for sustenance. Fish had been transported along with agricultural produce to New York City for sale throughout the nineteenth century, but the large-scale, commercial aspect of this new industry marked a distinct shift in operations and perspectives on fishing for the residents of this area. During the decade that followed the Civil War, a number of fish processing facilities were built between the rail terminal at Port Monmouth and the new steamboat dock on Comptons Creek. These facilities canned menhaden, also known as "moss bunkers" or "bunkers," as food for human consumption. The menhaden was Raritan Bay's most common fin fish and represented the bulk of the catches at Belford until the 1960s (MacKenzie, Jr. 1990:41).

The canned menhaden product was similar to the present-day packaging of sardines, and menhaden processors had aspirations of competing with the sardine producers, even going so far as to name their product "Shadines," as did Coit & Company ("New Enterprise..." n.d.: n.p.). The production process began with the scaling and steam-cooking of the fish. The fish were packed into cans with two small holes in the tops. The cans were then placed in a pickle bath, with the brine filling the cans through the holes. Following a second cooking while in the can, the holes in the cans were soldered and the cans were labeled and boxed. The canneries on the bayshore shipped most of the canned fish to markets in New York City via Middletown Transportation Company vessels operating from the Belford dock (Ellis 1885: 545; Hunton and McCabe 1980-4:178; Harris and Reyes 1991; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:55; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:25).

The American Club Fish Company was one of the first of the Belford fish enterprises and they established a small plant a short distance to the west of the Belford dock. A second enterprise, the American Sardine Company, became the largest of the fish companies in the area, with a facility that eventually included a large factory building and a boarding house. In one year during

its term of operation, this company shipped 150,000 cans of fish to markets in the United States and Europe (Ellis 1885:545; Leonard 1923: 117; Hunton and McCabe 1980-4:178; Harris and Reyes 1991; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:55; Porter et al. 1994:25-26).

The arrival of fish factories led to the development of a local commercial fishing fleet which provided the menhaden required by the plants and also exploited the other local marine resources. The mouth of Comptons Creek served as the primary docking area for a growing number of fishing vessels, just as it does at present day (Ellis 1885:545; Leonard 1923: 117; Hunton and McCabe 1980-4:178; Harris and Reyes 1991; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:55; Porter et al. 1994:25-26).

Port Monmouth's role as a rail terminal declined during the 1870s, and the facility and its associated rail line were eventually absorbed into the extensive Central Railroad of New Jersey system. The Seabrook steamboat interests also struggled during this period, leading to re-organization as the Middletown and Port Monmouth Steamboat Company in 1879. An economic downturn also brought change to the local commercial fishing industry during this period; by 1877, all of the menhaden canning factories on the bayshore had been shut down due to insolvency (Ellis 1885:545; Reussille 1975:146; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:55; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:25).

Recovery came quickly to the steamboat concerns and to the fishermen. By 1880, the Middletown and Port Monmouth Steamboat Company had recovered sufficiently to build and launch the steamboat "William V. Wilson," named for one of the company's leading figures and the owner of the Whitlock/Seabrook/Wilson House. The vessel operated from the Comptons Creek dock and was used primarily as a freight carrier (largely Monmouth County agricultural produce), although the company also offered passenger service between the bayshore and New York City. In 1882, the company was again re-organized, now as the Port Monmouth Steamboat Company (Leonard 1923:561-2; Reussille 1975:142-7; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:53-4,112; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994).

The "William V. Wilson" also transported fish and fish products to New York City, assisting in the recovery of the commercial fishing industry during this period. The abandoned menhaden canning plants were replaced with larger menhaden reduction factories, including those owned by A. Osborn & Son and David Vail and Daniel Vail. These new factories processed menhaden for oil and fish products instead of canning the fish for human consumption. The reduction process was begun by cooking the fish in water until they separated from the bone. The cooked fish was then placed into presses and the oil and the water was then drained off into tanks. The oil was skimmed from the surface of the tanks and put into large barrels. The remaining pressed cake of the fish, referred to as scrap, was removed from the presses and taken to wooden decks where it was spread out to dry in the sun. After drying, it was removed to the scrap house and bagged. This dried and pressed scrap was referred to as fish meal. Menhaden oil was used in the tanning and currying of leather, in the making of rope and soap, as lamp fuel, as a substitute for cod liver

oil, and in tempering steel. Menhaden meal was used as a component of fertilizer products (Ellis 1885:545; Harris and Reyes 1991; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:55-7,109-110; Monmouth County Historical Association vertical file; Porter et al. 1994:26,28).

Near the end of the nineteenth century, the Port Monmouth/Belford area was still generally referred to as Port Monmouth (ca. 1885 New Jersey Geological Survey map; Porter et al. 1994: 30). The former Raritan and Delaware Bay Railroad remained in service, but only as a spur line operated by the Central Railroad of New Jersey to serve the residual freight activities in the area. Development likely caused by the growth of the local commercial fishing industry was apparent within the bayshore area and in the Belford Main Street/Center Avenue area of what is now Belford (Porter et al. 1994:28). Development was also assisted by the dredging of Comptons Creek in 1896 by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (United States Army 1897-8: n.p.). In 1896 167,000 tons of freight, valued at \$337,000, traveled to or from Shoal Harbor, including 60,000 tons of farm produce, 70,000 tons of fish and shellfish, 4,000 tons of coal, and 25,000 tons of fertilizer (United States Army 1897-8:1152).

c. Twentieth Century

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the name Belford had come into common use (New Jersey Geological Survey 1901 and "Compton..." 1908: n.p.) and the bunker-processing factories located there were becoming more important to the local economy. Two large fish processing factories were located here at the beginning of the century -- the New York and New Jersey Oil Company with twenty-two employees and the Vernon S. Vail factory with sixteen employees. While the factories expanded, other activities that had once been prominent on the bayshore slowly declined. By this time, the former Raritan and Delaware Bay Railroad line terminated below Comptons Creek and the former terminal on the bayshore was abandoned. In 1912, an estimated 55,000 tons of freight traveled to or from Shoal Harbor, marking a notable decline from approximately 205,000 tons in 1901 and from the peak of 255,000 tons in 1904 (United States House of Representatives 1913: n.p.). In 1903, the Port Monmouth Steamboat Company sold the "William V. Wilson" and its Comptons Creek dock to the Monmouth Steamboat Company. In 1907, the "William V. Wilson" was destroyed by fire while berthed at its Belford dock, marking the end of steamboat transportation in the Port Monmouth/Belford area. Freighting formerly provided by steam vessels was now handled by various motorized vessels and the fishermen at Belford were installing gasoline-powered motors in their boats during 1900-1902 (Garrison 1906:32-3, 313-4; Leonard 1923:561-2; Reussille 1975:143-6; Harris and Reyes 1991; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:54-7; Monmouth County Historical Association vertical file; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:28,32).

With the decline of local transport activities, fishing and fish processing became the dominant economic pursuits along the bayshore. In 1911, J. Howard Smith bought out the several fish

processing facilities at Belford and established a menhaden reduction factory known as the J. Howard Smith Fish Oil and Fertilizer Works, now demolished. This facility included several large processing buildings, an employee dormitory, and a number of storage buildings, located immediately west of the present-day Shoal Harbor fishing community area. The factory became the largest plant of its type in the United States. Initially, the existing local fishing fleet provided ninety percent of the fish required by the new factory. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, the average fishing crew sold the company 20,000 to 30,000 bushels of bunkers a year, totaling approximately 300,000 bushels per year (MacKenzie, Jr. 1997:7).

J. Howard Smith had purchased extensive landholdings in the area, including the land along Comptons Creek. Berths along the northern end of the creek were rented to fisherman at very low rates, assuring a continuing supply of fish for the plant. The products of the Smith facility during the early part of the century included oil (used in the production of paint, rope, soap, and leather), meal (used as fertilizer and later as animal feed), and fish solubles (dried fish blood, which was also used as an animal feed) (Sanborn Map Company 1924; Hunton and McCabe 1980-4; Harris and Reyes 1991; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:121-4; Porter et al. 1994:32).

The expansion of the local fishing and fish processing industries contributed to the continued development of the Port Monmouth/Belford area during the first half of the twentieth century (New Jersey Geological Survey 1932). The Smith factory expanded considerably during this period, processing 200,000,000 menhaden in an average year and up to 400,000,000 in a busy year. After the first World War, an "in-house" fleet of fishing boats was developed to supplement the fish provided by the independent Belford fishermen (Sanborn Map Company 1924/1945; Hunton and McCabe 1980-4; Harris and Reyes 1991; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:124-5; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994). During the 1930s, when business was slow, the fishermen developed a "freezer trade" to Forked River and Spring Lake to supplement their wages from the Smith factory. Trucks came to Belford from these shore points to the south specifically to collect the fish (Schnoor 1991:6). After the 1930s, all fish freight was trucked to market (MacKenzie, Jr. 1990: 44).

The Smith factory continued to expand, remaining the dominant economic feature in the Port Monmouth/Belford area during the years that followed World War II. The continued presence of this facility assisted this section of the bayshore to remain viable for commercial fishing. In 1947, Smith built an airstrip on the east shore and purchased three airplanes to be used to spot schools of menhaden by aerial survey. A pilot would spot the schools of fish and radio down to the boats with the location. The plane would then circle over the school until the boat arrived (Schnoor 1991:2).

Use of the company's two primary products expanded into new areas during this period. Menhaden oil was still used mostly as a component of paint, but it was also used in cosmetics and

in the manufacture of linoleum, while scrap was sold primarily as feed for poultry and catfish farming (Sanborn Map Company 1924/1945; Hunton and McCabe 1980-4; Harris and Reyes 1991; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:124,187-8; Porter and Cavallo 1992; Porter et al. 1994:32).

The J. Howard Smith company continued to buy fish from the local fishermen, but gradually replaced the local fishermen with African-American fishermen from Virginia, where Smith also had factories (Anonymous interview 1998:19; Harris and Reyes 1991:37). Smith also had factories in Louisiana, "Carolina", and Mississippi (Schnoor 1991:2). The interdependent relationship between Smith and the Belford fishermen continued through their dock-leasing arrangement. Smith owned all of the wetlands surrounding the Creek and rented dock space to the fishermen for a nominal fee. The fishermen were thus a readily-available labor force, and the leased land provided the factory with a 'buffer zone' from competing fish factories (Harris and Reyes 1991:37).

The local fishing industry saw a significant decline beginning in 1964 as the effects of pollution, over-fishing, and new restrictions on fishing methods affected menhaden catches. The Smith factory experienced a related decline, and in 1974 the property was sold to Hanson Limited Trust, an English concern that operated the factory for several years as Seacoast Products. In 1981, the plant was shut down as competition from soybean oil and the declining menhaden population made operations unprofitable. The leasing arrangement with the factory ended at this time, and the Port Monmouth/Belford area has suffered a significant decline since the fish processing industry left the bayshore. However, the local fishing fleet survives and continues to operate from the Comptons Creek docking facilities (Hunton and McCabe 1980-84; Harris and Reyes 1991; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:124,189-90; Porter et al. 1994:32).

By 1951, the fishermen were shipping approximately ninety percent of their catch to commission merchants at the Fulton Fish Market in New York City on consignment, with ten percent being sold to local merchants. These fishermen believed that the market was cheating them, but they felt they had no recourse as independents. To combat this, they established the Belford Seafood Cooperative in 1951, with approximately twenty-five charter members, eventually purchasing most of the land on both sides of the creek. As a cooperative, the fishermen insisted that rather than selling the fish on consignment, wholesale buyers must confirm the price of the fish before shipment was made. The Co-op also recorded the weight of the fish before they were shipped. The majority of the fish caught by Co-op members was packaged and sold wholesale to the Fulton Fish market in lower Manhattan and fish markets in Philadelphia and Baltimore, whichever brought the highest price (Duff 1995:22; MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:197). In addition to the power gained by operating as a group, the Co-op was able to purchase supplies in bulk at cheaper rates than fishermen could purchase individually. The Co-op generated operating income by charging fishermen a one-time fee to join the Cooperative and a commission on the sale of fish unloaded at the Co-op docking facility. The membership fee in 1951 was \$100; it is now \$1,500 (Anonymous interview 1998: 7). In 1980, two commercial fishing organizations operated in Belford. One was

the Co-op, which had 120 members and employed six full- and part-time dock workers. The other was the now-defunct Seacoast Products (MacKenzie, Jr. 1990:42). The harbor presently houses a commercial fleet numbering approximately seventy commercial fishing vessels. The fleet includes members of the Co-op as well as "independents." Co-op vessels are generally larger than those belonging to independents and are "predominantly oriented toward druggers and other finfish" activities, whereas the independents "focus primarily on shellfish and lobster" and other estuarine species as well as smaller-scale finfish ventures (Princeton Economic Research, Inc. 1985:5; Harris and Reyes 1991:41).

2. History of the Shoal Harbor Fishery

Since the 1870s Belford has been the principal finfishing port in Raritan Bay (McCay 1984). Pound netting for menhaden was the predominant means of fishing, sometimes employing as many as 300 men, as it did just after World War II. "Nearly every year, menhaden, always predictable, abundant, and a reliable money-maker, constituted over 90 percent of the port's landings by weight" (MacKenzie, Jr. 1992:110 from McKay 1981).

Pound nets were first brought to Raritan Bay in 1855 and have been in continuous use since 1873. The nets were installed in rows, all perpendicular to the shore and located as far as two miles offshore (MacKenzie, Jr. 1997:7). "Pound nets were the first gear, except for hooks and lines, capable of catching fish beyond the immediate shorelines of the bay and they caught fish in large quantities. A typical daily catch of fish in a net was about 100 bushels, but 1,000 bushels/net was not uncommon" (MacKenzie, Jr. 1997:7). In 1880, there were 27 pound nets in New Jersey and by 1921, 151 pound nets, employing 887 men, were in use (True 1887: n.p.; McKay 1981:367). Annual yields in the 1940s for pound net crews averaged 20,000 to 30,000 bushels of menhaden (MacKenzie, Jr. 1990: 43).

A pound net is a "large, stationary fish trap with a long leader and two or three heart-shaped bays that direct fish into a net 'pocket' from which they can be removed. These weir-like devices were very costly to construct and maintain, and required a great deal of human labor (McKay 1981:369). The details of the processes and the types and uses of nets has been extensively researched and published by Clyde MacKenzie, Jr. It is recommended that the reader seek out his work for in-depth descriptions and discussions of the tools and methods of the traditional fisheries in Raritan Bay. His description of pound nets follows:

Pound nets were made in six sections: a pocket or pound, measuring about 40 x 50 feet; a leader, 540 feet long; two small hearts (curved nets), each 100 feet long, installed opposite one another; and a large heart consisting of two sections, each 200 feet long, also installed opposite one another. Each pound net was held in place by 70 hickory poles, 30 to 40

feet long, driven into the mud or sand bottom [of the Bay]. Before World War II, the nets were made of cotton and lasted only one season. Later, nylon was used, but otherwise the design was not changed. New nets were knitted by women in Belford while others were machine-made and purchased from commercial suppliers. Fish in the bay would encounter the leader and swim offshore toward the pound. If they did not swim into its mouth, they swam along one of the hearts which was curled in such a way that the fish were directed back toward the mouth. Once inside the pound, few found their way out. Just after dawn every day except Sunday, crews removed the fish and took them into Belford.

A crew needed a boat about 36 feet long to hold 350 bushels of fish, a docking site in Belford, two sets of pound nets, a large field to spread out a net, and a tarring tank at the edge of the field. One set of nets was installed in the bay for two weeks, while the other was being cleaned, repaired, and tarred in the field. Before 1900, each crew could handle but one pound net. The nets were set close to shore in about 12 feet of water. Crews either poled their sloops out to them, or sailed to the nets installed off Sandy Hook. Around 1900, motors were installed in the boats. Crews could then handle two-to-three pound nets and set them in water as deep as 24 feet. The pound nets were set up as early as March to catch shad, [and set up] in April and May to catch bunkers (menhaden). Some [nets] were left through the fall while others were removed after June when fewer bunkers entered the nets. The boats returned from the pound nets and arrived in Belford between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m., where the local ladies waited to purchase fresh weakfish, bluefish, striped bass, and porgies (scup). But most of the catch was bunkers (MacKenzie, Jr. 1997:7).

Pound net fishing began to decline in the 1950s due to a lack of available manpower for the labor-intensive pound net method. "The problem continued and by the 1990s the rules and regulations of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission began preventing fishermen from landing some money-making species at specific times... as part of the overall coastal fisheries conservation program. In addition, the pound nets were not nearly as efficient at catching fish as otter trawls which became much more prominent after the 1940s" (MacKenzie, Jr. 1997:7). For the first time in 124 years, no pound nets were installed in Raritan Bay in 1997, marking a loss from the single net installed in 1996 (MacKenzie, Jr. 1997:1) and the meager four nets installed in 1994 (Schnoor 1991:7).

B. HISTORY OF THE SITE

The Port Monmouth/Belford area was represented in some detail in the Atlas of Monmouth County published in 1873. Port Monmouth, as defined on this map, included a number of structures scattered between the bayshore and the village of New Monmouth. The bayshore area of what is now Belford was dominated by the Middletown Transportation Company's steamboat dock and the American Sardine Company and the American Club Fish Company fish processing plants. A third fish plant (Coit & Company) and approximately ten structures (mainly dwellings) were located to the south of the creek in the vicinity of the intersection of Belford Main Street and Center Avenue (Beers 1873; Porter et al. 1994:26). No structures were depicted in the area of the present-day Shoal Harbor fishing community.

A 1912 War Department map depicts several buildings in the area of the present-day Shoal Harbor fishing community. Although the types of businesses are not listed, the buildings are depicted as belonging to R. L. Morris, Messrs. Turner and Castler, F. W. Clayton, the Collins Brothers, Messrs. Nelson and McHenry, and J. Carroll (United States House of Representatives 1913). In 1924, the area of the present-day fishing community contained Elmer Clayton's boat shop with a marine railway leading to the northernmost bend of the creek, the Collins Bros. coal yard, Carroll's Hotel, two buildings listed as stores, a filling station, three dwellings immediately south of the creek along Main Street, and seven dwellings behind the hotel (Sanborn Map Company 1924). In 1926-27 a steel girder swing bridge was constructed to carry Main Street across the creek, replacing an earlier frame draw bridge (Hunton and McCabe 1980-84). This bridge was removed after 1991.

A 1932 map depicts the area as containing the Collins Bros. property, which had switched from the sale of coal to the sale of building materials, Carroll's Hotel, and the two stores. A 1945 Sanborn map depicts several small buildings at the Collins Bros. construction company stone yard, the two stores, a single-story net house, a filling station, Carroll's Hotel and seven dwellings behind the hotel (Sanborn Map Company 1924/1945). A 1951 United States Army Corps of Engineers map depicts Carroll's Hotel, the Shoal Harbor fishery, and Castler's boat yard (United States House of Representatives 1951:n.p.). The report accompanying this map mentions the presence of thirty-five small landings located along the Creek, two boat yards, and two fuel pumps (United States House of Representatives 1951:13-14).

Port Monmouth Road was realigned in 1952 to circumvent the growing J. Howard Smith factory. The hotel and residences located within the realignment were removed at that time. While residences were present in Belford, the area never succumbed to the summer resort pressures as did other bayside communities; the smell of the fish-processing plants was not tolerated by anyone other than the locals (MacKenzie, Jr. 1992: 111).

The 1970 U.S.G.S. map depicts the former Co-op building along the north end of the west shore of Comptons Creek, the masonry net house beside a smaller building, and a building at the location of the Marine railway at the east shore of the creek, south of the bridge.

PART II: DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

A. THE BAYMEN'S ETHOS: BUILDING FOR IMPERMANENCE

The Shoal Harbor fishing community is the setting for all activities associated with the fisheries. The preparation and maintenance activities, as well as the processing and the sale of fish are all situated at this location. Much time is spent here by the fishermen in repairing landside structures, nets, and boats, and constructing gear.

The site is characterized by the impermanent nature of most of the buildings and structures. The structures are maintained only to the point of sufficiency, and building with a long-term view of the future does not occur. This perceived impermanence is caused by the unpredictability of the catch and the historical season-to-season leasing arrangements with the commercial fish-processing plants.

The nature of fishing is risky and unpredictable, with reliance on inherently-unreliable resources, weather conditions, and the variability of market prices for the catches. The uncertainty that accompanies this work encourages minimal investment in the built environment.

The majority of the landside structures require a low degree of monetary investment to remain viable, regardless of seaside activities. This is especially true when one considers the zero labor costs incurred when the fishermen themselves perform all maintenance and/or construction tasks. ...The strategies of labor and monetary investment are principally directed towards the insecurities presented by the sea (Harris and Reyes 1991:48). The essential element in the 'baymen[']' strategic outlook is the mutability of things, and the necessity to carefully measure one's input against projected returns. ... An informant's assertion that the piers are "not too elaborate ... Because you might be here and gone tomorrow," is not simply an assessment of the unpredictability of things, but an incisive statement about investment strategies in a risky environment. (Harris and Reyes 1991:60)

Additionally, the "build light, low investment strategy" (Harris and Reyes 1991: 60) contributing to the "run-down" appearance of the structures is a response to the season-to-season nature of the business. Historically, the leasing arrangement between the J. Howard Smith factory and the

fishermen was a token one dollar-per-year, year-to-year, rental agreement for each vessel berth. This mutually beneficial arrangement has provided the fishermen with a location from which to base their independent operations and has provided a “steady pool of labor for the plant during its own periods of peak activity” (Harris and Reyes 1991: 65).

B. BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The seventy-acre site lies along Comptons Creek at Raritan Bay. The community’s facilities occupy 1,000 linear feet of frontage on each bank and an additional 500 feet on the west bank upstream of the former Main Street crossing. The creek is bounded by tidal wetlands on both banks. The west side of the inner channel, which supports the fleet’s activities, is bulkheaded. A 280-foot pier maintained by the Cooperative is located within the bulkheaded area. The channel’s east bank contains a series of approximately fifteen timber walkway structures and piers that were built by their users. Approximately twenty-five piers and walkways are located on the west bank. Other wooden structures are located predominantly on the west bank of the creek east of Main Street. These structures relate to the fleet’s past and present activities and include net-drying wheels, an ice house, a packing shed and numerous storage sheds. The east bank is unimproved except for frame finger piers, frame walkways and a dirt path.

1. Piers and Walkways

The wooden piers and walkways are the predominant visual feature of the community. It is unknown when the piers were initially constructed. The structures have been rebuilt and repaired repeatedly over time, creating a continuity of materials and construction techniques. These narrow piers may best be described as finger piers. The approximately fifteen-foot wide structures project no more than fifty feet from the shore into the channel. The piers rest on wooden piles driven into the mud bank of the creek and are three to four feet above the low-water line.

The channel is shallow and the compounding effect of the tide allows only the ends of the piers to be used for mooring. The ends of the piers have ladders that lead into the water, providing access to the moored vessels regardless of the state of the tide. Some of the piers have wooden platforms tethered to their ends that rise and fall with the tide. These platforms provide a working area that is always at the same height as the vessel, which is advantageous when the tide is low.

2. Buildings and Structures

The single-story Co-op building was constructed in 1991 of pre-fabricated materials. The building contains the Co-op offices, packing facilities, a small restaurant, and a retail space. The gable-roofed building has a metal roof and walls and rests on a poured-concrete pad. Fenestration is clustered at the north gable end at the location of the restaurant, providing diners with views of the bay. Large openings for forklifts are located at the northeast corner, and at the south and east elevations.

The stuccoed, concrete-block Net House was constructed in the 1950s for winter storage of the nets. The building is capped with a gabled, metal roof, and an exterior brick chimney is located on the east gable end. The north elevation is six bays long with vehicle-sized openings at the first floor and paired, single-light, metal-framed casement windows with stuccoed brick lintels at the second floor. The south elevation contains twelve bays of similar casement windows at the first and second floors. The open, twenty-acre area south of the building is used for net repair. An area this large is necessary so that the nets can be spread out.

The Ice Plant is an irregularly-shaped, two-story building constructed of buttressed concrete block at the first floor and aluminum siding at the second floor. The building houses ice-making machinery. The second floor of the west section is cantilevered over a concrete-block base. A one and one-half-story wing attached to the south elevation has large sliding doors hung from an overhead track. Two-over-two and six-over-six windows are located throughout the building. The building was constructed in the 1950s (Harris and Reyes 1991: 71).

The Freezer building is a single-story, corrugated metal building with a corrugated metal gable roof. A metal freezer door is centered in the northwest gable end. A small, single-story, shed-roofed wing with a large fan mounted on the roof is also located at the northwest gable end. A concrete-block loading dock is located along the southwest elevation. The building was constructed after 1945.

The old Co-op Office building is a small, square-plan building covered with asphalt and asbestos shingles. The frame building is capped with an asymmetrical gable roof with overhanging eaves and exposed rafter ends and rests on a poured concrete pad. Six-over-one wood sash windows with simple drip moldings are located on the east and north elevations. A three-light over three-panel wood door located on the east elevation is sheltered by a shed-roofed overhang. The building appears to have been constructed in the first quarter of the twentieth century, but does not appear on the 1945 Sanborn map.

The small, single-story building constructed of rusticated concrete block appears on the 1913 map. The two-bay, shed-roofed building has false parapets capped with tile coping. Two single-

story frame wings are attached to the east elevation. Double wood doors are centered in the south elevation.

The single-story Packing House, which appears on the 1924 Sanborn map, is of frame construction and its capped with an asphalt-shingle gable roof. The building is sheathed with asbestos shingles and modern vertical-board siding. The roof overhangs on the east elevation, sheltering the windows along that elevation that are now boarded up. A single-story open shed wing is located along the west elevation.

The Shoal Harbor Lobster Wholesale building was constructed in 1990 and is of similar construction and form to the Co-op building, having a metal roof and walls. Fenestration is clustered at the west end of the structure facing Main Street.

The Belford Marine Railway building is a single-story building five bays long with its gable end facing the creek. The asphalt-shingled roof has boxed, overhanging eaves. The stuccoed building has two-over-two and one-over-one wood sash windows with brick sills. The north gable end has an overhead garage door and a glass and metal human-scale door. An exterior brick chimney is located at the south end of the building. The attic elevation is sheathed with board and batten plywood. A support building located northwest of the main building is a single-story, three-bay building with a side-gabled roof. The frame building is sided with asbestos shingles and rests on a concrete block foundation. Nine-over-six-light wood sash windows with simple drip moldings are located throughout the building. An off-center wood door with three lights is located on the east elevation. The south elevation contains a garage door and a six-light window in the gable peak. A single-story wing to the north is constructed of corrugated metal nailed to wood posts with a shed roof. The heavy external post and beam construction probably supports a gantry crane. A second wing is sheathed with modern vertical-board siding and has two windows in the north elevation. The two buildings were constructed after 1945.

The approximately thirty-nine storage sheds and structures are located on the piers and in the storage areas. They are constructed in one of four forms. The first, most traditional, form is the small, square, gabled-roof shed sheathed with various wood materials, with or without windows. The second form is created from salvaged freezer compartments from trucks that are placed directly on the ground. The third form is constructed of corrugated metal with shed roofs. The fourth form, a recent derivation, is prefabricated tool sheds like those typically purchased at home centers for suburban backyard use.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

No architectural drawings exist.

B. EARLY VIEWS

Several early views are presented in Gabrielan, Randall, compiler. Images of America: Middletown Township. Dover, N.H.: Arcadia, 1994.

Several early views are presented in MacKenzie, Jr., Clyde. "History of the Fisheries of Raritan Bay, New York and New Jersey." Marine Fisheries Review. Vol. 52, No. 4:1990.

Engraving of "Sardine Fishery, Sandy Hook" appearing in Harper's Weekly, April 18, 1874, is depicted in Pictorial Guide to Victorian New Jersey, Robert B. Burnett, compiler and editor. Newark, New Jersey: New Jersey Historical Society, 1986. Engraving depicts the menhaden canning process.

The Monmouth County Historical Association in Freehold, New Jersey also has photographs.

C. INTERVIEWS

Schnoor, Sonny, retired fisherman. Interview conducted by Wendy Harris, Senior Archaeologist, Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, on February 2, 1991. Transcript on file with the Army Corps of Engineers.

Two anonymous retired fishermen. Interview conducted by Robert C. Stewart of Historical Technologies, Inc. January 26, 1998. Transcript and audio tape on file with the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office.

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E. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Note: This text was copied verbatim from a framed document located on a wall in the "Pirate's Cove" restaurant located in the north end of the Belford Seafood Co-op building, Belford, New Jersey. It is undated.

“Brief History of the Belford Seafood Co-op

“In 1951, 25 to 30 local fishermen formed a co-op which was known as the Belford Seafood Cooperative Association, Inc. They were unhappy with the prices they received for their catches and someone made a suggestion to form a co-op among them. They called a meeting at the independent fire house on Main St., Belford. They had someone with the knowledge of establishing such an organization (State Co-op official) help set up state by-laws and guide them. Some of the main figures in this were Carl Richardson, Bill Richardson, Joseph Yahara, John Fisler, Arthur Torthorsen. They hired a manager, Louis Freeman, who was a trucker, bookkeeper, salesman or in other words, a one man show.

“The first building was about a 6 x 10 on Main St. which was 200 feet over the bridge on the left side of Compton Creek. There was also a packing dock across from the co-op. The organization rented the packing dock from the owner, Clarence Thompson. Two years later they moved to a new location on the end of the same street, 1/4 mile down on the right side, where it stands today.

“In the beginning it started out primarily as a loading dock. After one year they had a dinner to celebrate the first anniversary and this continued for three years after.

“There were many disagreements among the members and many hard times especially when the fishing was not prosperous but they pulled together and kept the co-op going because of hard work and dedication by the members. This is why it is the thriving business that it is today.

“Original Families

Adabada
Anthroppoles
Boyce
Braum
Dorn
Richardson
Schnoor
Tarnow
Thompson

Original Individuals

Warren Apel Sr.
Jim Conelly
Walt Eastman
Louis Egnatovich Sr.
Richard Isaksen
Bret Maxon
Leonard Nelson
Ali Oswald
Herman Pulsh”

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The project entails construction of a ferry terminal and appurtenant features along the eastern shore of Comptons Creek, including a parking lot, new bulkheading, an interpretive center, an access road and a bridge. Future approved development will include widening the creek along the eastern shore and construction of various equipment storage buildings, for a total of eleven buildings. An Agreement between the County of Monmouth and the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office dated July 1996 stipulated Historic American Buildings Survey documentation of the community.

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