

BAY CITY TRACTION AND ELECTRIC COMPANY,
POWER STATION
301 Washington Street
Bay City
Bay County
Michigan

HAER NO. MI-76-A

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
Great Lakes System Office
National Park Service
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, NE 68102-2571

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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BAY CITY TRACTION AND ELECTRIC COMPANY, POWER STATION

HAER NO. MI-76-A

Location: 211 Water Street, Bay City Michigan, NW1/4, SW1/4, NE1/4, NW1/4,
Section 28, T14N, R5E, Civil Town of Bangor, Bay County, Michigan.

UTM: : 17.266700.4830390
USGS Quadrangle: Bay City, Michigan, 1: 24,000

Date of
Construction: 1893

Architect: Leverett A. Pratt, Pratt & Koeppe

Present Owner: City of Bay City
301 Washington Street
Bay City, Michigan 48708

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Bay City Traction and Electric Power Station Building was
constructed as a steam generating plant providing power for interurban
electric traction transportation in Bay City, Michigan. This building
represents a brief but important 30 year period of electric traction power
utilized for mass transportation in Michigan cities.

Project Information: This mitigative document was undertaken in 1996 in accordance with
Stipulation 1(A)(1) of the First Amcnded Memorandum of Agreement
between the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, the U.S.
Environmental Protection Agency, the Bay County Historical Society,
and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, The structure
associated with the Bay City Traction and Electric Company is scheduled
for demolition.

Dr. John D. Richards, Principal Investigator; Patricia B. Richards,
Project Historian with Great Lakes Archaeological Research Center, Inc.;
Joseph Paskus, Project Photographer.

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INTRODUCTION

The history of Michigan's utility companies and the history of the state of Michigan itself are intrinsically linked. By the 1850s, just a few decades after the frontier settlement of Michigan, communities of Michigan boasted lighted streets, homes and public meeting places. This early lighting was provided by manufactured gas which served to bridge the gap between earlier candle illumination and later electric bulbs.

Michigan's Consumers Power Company is arguably the most significant player in the history of utilities of the state of Michigan. Consumers Power Company had seven gas company predecessors and seven electric company predecessors. The early electric predecessors of Consumers Power Company were an assorted group of private and municipally owned companies including the Bay City Power Company. The Bay City Power Company was in turn made up of smaller individual concerns including the Bay City Traction and Electric Company. The early traction lines in Bay City and elsewhere in southern Michigan had no actual corporate relationship with Consumers Power Company or its predecessor companies. However, these early companies were affiliated organizations and ultimately became part of the same holding company.

BAY CITY

Bay City is a long, narrow, irregularly shaped community occupying both sides of the Saginaw River in Bay County, Michigan. The city is located about one and one half miles south of Saginaw Bay on Lake Huron and stretches southward along the river for a distance of approximately six miles. Present day Bay City is the amalgamation of five earlier settlements. The east bank settlements were Lower Saginaw (later renamed as Bay City) and Portsmouth. The west bank settlements included Banks, Salzburg and Wenona.

The presence of Euro-Americans in the Saginaw Valley of Michigan was sporadic throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Two treaties entered into by the United States Government and the Chippewa (Ojibwa) Indians involved the area near Bay City and ultimately opened the way for American settlement of the region. In the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw, the Chippewa ceded much of their land in northeastern Michigan, reserving some 101,000 acres in sixteen tracts. Two of these tracts were roughly coincident with present-day Bay City. A 640 acre tract was granted to a metis Chippewa, John Riley "at the head of the first marsh above the mouth of the Saginaw River, on the east side thereof".[1] On the west side of the Saginaw River a 40,000 acre parcel was reserved. The years following the Treaty of Saginaw did not see any major influx of Euro-American settlement in the area of Bay City or the Saginaw River valley in general. In 1830, only three Euro-American families were reported to be living in the Saginaw Valley.[2] By 1840, following a record number of immigrants to the Michigan area during the previous decade, Saginaw County (which included present-day Bay County) had a white population of 892.[3]

However, in 1837, a second important treaty, the Treaty of Detroit, provided for the cession of the reserved tracts of land still in the possession of the Chippewa. These lands were ceded to the United States, which in turn, was to sell the land for \$5.00 an acre.[4] In response to this opportunity, a number of stock companies were organized to purchase land from the

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government. By 1837, the Portsmouth Company had platted out the town site known as Portsmouth, but settlement was slow until the 1850s when new investors financed and built additional lumber mills along the Saginaw River. Also in 1837, the Saginaw Bay Company constructed a blockhouse further north on the Saginaw River and financed the purchase of 640 acres. Development in the Lower Saginaw was slow and it was not until 1849 that the proprietors of the Saginaw Bay Company actually subdivided their holdings in the form of a town plat. Town lots were surveyed and laid out for the village of Lower Saginaw (Bay City). These lots ran parallel to the river for about fourteen blocks and then eastward for about ten blocks.[5] In 1837, Bay County was carved out as a separate political entity from the larger Saginaw County and Lower Saginaw was renamed Bay City. Two years later Bay City was incorporated as a village, and in 1865 the community was chartered as a city. In 1873 the west bank communities of Salzburg, Banks and Wenona merged to form West Bay City. Similarly Portsmouth became part of Bay City in 1874. Finally, east and west merged to form the present-day city of Bay City in 1903.[6]

Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century the lumber industry formed the backbone of the region's economy and growth. However, after reaching a peak of board feet production in 1882, lumbering in the region began to decline.[7] Other industry spurred by the lumber industry included shipbuilding and barrel manufacturing, and it is these industries that took the place of the declining lumber production. Salt production, an industry based on local salt deposits also played an important part in the history of Bay City.[8] Population increase was significant in Bay City during the 1870s and 1880s due in part to the annexation of Portsmouth, Banks, Wenona, and Salzburgh. However, German and Polish immigrants sought jobs in the new industries of Bay City and served to increase population as well. Homes began to be built further and further from the river making river transportation impractical.[9] Transportation within the city became a major concern and individual horse-drawn carriages were not sufficient to meet the burgeoning demand.

BAY CITY TRACTION AND ELECTRIC

Traction lines, or electric streetcars, were an important component of early inter-city transportation in the state of Michigan. Additionally, traction lines were vital to the development of the early electric companies of the state.[10] The early electric companies of Michigan had begun primarily to provide street lighting; however, furnishing electricity for streetcars quickly became a major portion of the business. The importance of the traction business to early electric companies is evidenced by one historian's comment that "it was often impossible for them to obtain financing unless they could show they had traction contracts".[11]

The period of electric streetcar utilization in Michigan lasted some 30 years from the late 1880's until the early 1920's. In the lower Saginaw valley rapid population growth in the 1870s and 1880's fueled the need for an efficient means of transporting people within and between city boundaries. Prior to the 1880's necessary transportation for those living in one community and working in another or for those wishing to conduct business in another city was provided by horse-drawn railways. By 1874, companies such as the Bay City and Portsmouth Street Railway or its successor the Bay City Street and Transit Railway Company were providing horse-drawn cars for passenger traffic during the day and steam engines to pull freight cars at night.

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By 1880, neither the horse drawn cars nor individual carriages could cope with increased traffic and use. Steam locomotives were unpopular for city use due to the smoke they produced.[12] Electric streetcars offered fast, frequent, and efficient mass transportation. West Bay City began operation of an electric streetcar line in 1889 and "the cars at the Third Street Bridge were drawn across the river by horses to connect up with the Bay City horse-drawn line".[13] By 1893 the success of the West Bay City electric line had spurred the development of a similar line to service Bay City.

From 1893 to 1919 electric streetcars were operated successfully in Bay City by the Bay City Traction and Electric Company and its successors. Founded in 1893, Bay City Traction and Electric Company became an operating company with stock controlled by the Saginaw Bay City Railway & Light Company in 1903. By 1910, the Bay City Power Company absorbed the electric properties of the Bay City Traction and Electric Company [14] A series of labor disputes and unpopular rate increases contributed to decreasing ridership for the Bay City electric streetcar line until in 1919 the line began operating at a loss.

The following recollection of Robert Trudell chronicles the Bay City electric streetcar days:

I remember riding the streetcars in the early 1900s. In the winter there stood a small coal stove in a space where a seat had been. This stove was stoked by the conductor, and often the car was either too hot or too cold, but we were used to that in our homes. I never heard any complaints.

There was strung overhead, full length of the car, a rope running through loops to a register at the front end. The conductor, as each five cent fare was collected, gave this cord a pull and thus recorded the coins. The system discouraged any knocking-down by the conductor, though it was rumored this happened, especially when the car was overloaded. A good conductor was supposed to divide with the motorman --all this in spite of knowing the firm had unidentified spotters riding the cars.

All lines met at Center and Washington, central stop with an elevated kiosk, where a policeman directed traffic. If you wanted to go on one of the other lines, you needed a transfer slip, free at first but later costing a penny.

If you desired the open-air car to Wenona Beach, the fare was only 15 cents round-trip. The beach was a kids' paradise. You had so much fun riding the roller coaster, merry-go-round, Old Mill, etc., for a nickel a ride! A hot dog, sack of popcorn or bottle of pop also cost a nickel. At Wright's Cafe a whitefish or steak dinner cost 50 cents.

Then came the streetcar strike, about 1904. The company decided to fight the wage and hour demands, and ordered in the Pinkerton strike-breakers. They quickly found where the people's sympathies were. There were few riders as cars looked empty on their routes. Hardly a car made the run to Essexville and back without windows being broken by kids throwing stones.

I don't know how other regions of town fared for transportation, but we in Essexville found a new way to get uptown for the same nickel fee. William P. Kavanagh's fish house at the foot of Scheurmann Street became the terminal for our new transportation

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system. With a slow season for fishing, Billy's fishing tug was turned into a jitney bus-boat to Bay City taking passengers on a pleasant cruise upriver to disembark at the foot of center Avenue where Wenona Park is today.[15]

Until 1907 electric railways were top earners for the stock holders of the various utility companies of Michigan, natural gas was second and electric service was third.[16] By 1921 electric service was the top money maker and traction was a very poor third. Operation costs of traction companies increased; however, rate increases were (predictably) unpopular among the users of the electric streetcars. Thus, additional operating revenue was difficult to acquire. Furthermore, the success of early internal combustion engine powered jitney buses led to significantly decreased ridership on the more expensive electric streetcars. Jitney buses acquired their name as a result of the 5 cent "jitney" or fare charged on these vehicles. Increasing competition from these so-called jitney buses ultimately led to the discontinuation of the electric street car service in Bay City on August 10, 1921.[17]

BAY CITY TRACTION AND ELECTRIC COMPANY POWER BUILDING

The Bay City Traction and Electric Company Power Station was constructed in 1893 and first documented on an 1895 Sanborn Insurance map of Bay City.[18] The structure operated as a generating plant until 1913 when Consumers Power Company of Michigan took control of the property. Industrial Brownhoist Company occupied the building during the 1960s and 1970s. Sometime in the 1980s the building was sold to Bay Aggregate Company who leased it to the Bay City Boat Company. The building is currently owned by the City of Bay City, Michigan.

The original 1893 structure consisted of a rectangular brick building with a gabled slate shingle roof. The building measures 66 feet in width, 89 feet 1 inch in length, and is built on a foundation of cut stone. The 1908 addition is shorter than the large gabled section of the building. The addition has a depth of 15 feet 5 inches. The roof of the addition is flat.

The 1893 portion of the power station building contained rows of six double-hung leaded glass windows on the building's north and south elevations. A pair of double hung leaded glass windows was located on the eastern elevation, and nine additional windows were located along the southern elevation at the rear of the building. Entrances to the building are located on the east and south elevations. A personnel door is located at the southern end of the east elevation, 48 inches above ground level. Access to the door originally was provided by a raised concrete porch and a concrete stairway. The stairs and porch have been replaced with a concrete ramp leading from the door to a set of abandoned railroad tracks located east of the building. An additional personnel door is located at the western end of the south elevation. This entrance is also raised above ground level, and is accessed by a concrete stairway. A third personnel door was formerly located at the western end of the south elevation. This door was replaced with a large overhead garage door during the 1980s when the building was utilized as a boat manufacturing facility.[19]

One of the most dramatic features of the original 1893 design was the use of corbie gables and dormers. Corbie gables and dormers have stepped edges (Corbie steps) that mask the pitch of the roof or dormer.[20] Corbie steps are most commonly found in northern European masonry and in New World derivatives.[21] Another striking feature of the original Bay City Traction and Electric Company Power Station was the placement of large circular leaded fan lights in

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each of the gables and dormers. In later alterations to the building, these fanlights were removed and bricked over.

In 1908, an addition was attached to the Bay City Power Station. The addition consisted of a single story, flat-roofed brick structure located on the north side of the 1893 building. The addition contained pairs of double-hung leaded windows on the east and west elevations, and a single row of eight double hung leaded windows on the north elevation.

The Bay City Traction and Electric Company Power Station was designed to include two working levels. The lower level or dynamo room housed the electrical generators and various associated machinery. The DC/AC current generating system included two 500 kW generators, one 350 kW generator, and one 120 kW generator. A 500 kW AC current turbine, a 63 kW booster, three 10,000 volt oil bath transformers and a single 11,000 volt oil bath transformer completed the generating system. All machinery was removed prior to the 1920s, and the lower level is currently gutted. The lower level has a poured concrete floor cut by several drainage channels.

The upper level of the building is divided into three sections, each with a poured concrete floor. The easternmost section of the upper level extends approximately 40 feet west from the Water Street elevation. A free-standing windowed office cubicle is located in the northeast corner of the front section of the upper level. The office cubicle measures approximately 10 feet in width, and 15 feet in length. A bathroom and storage room are also located in the northeast corner of the front room. Two stairways leading to the lower level of the building are located along the longitudinal axis of the front section of the upper level. One stairway is located adjacent to the office cubicle, while the other is located approximately 40 feet to the south of the office.

The middle section of the upper level is a narrow, hall-like space to the west of the front section. The western wall of the middle section is constructed of 2 by 4 inch building studs and plywood sheeting. A drop ceiling containing electrical light fixtures has been constructed between the plywood wall and the brick wall separating the middle section of the upper level from the front section. Doorways in the plywood wall provide a view of the lower level of the building. This section was likely constructed as a safety measure subsequent to removal of the lower level machinery.

The rear section of the upper level is a narrow 15 feet 5 inches wide space extending along the extreme western end of the building. The rear section houses sliding doors in the east wall that allow a view of the lower level. The rear section has recently been paneled and carpeted for use as a temporary office. Originally, this section was designed as a cold storage facility.

LEVERETT A. PRATT

The following discussion draws heavily on the biography of Pratt & Koeppel, Architects, compiled by Dale Patrick Wolicki of the Bay County Historical Society. The burgeoning lumber industry of the Saginaw Valley in the years following the Civil War drew a number of prominent architects and builders to the Bay City area. Among these was Leverett A. Pratt who at 23 years of age opened an office in Bay City, Michigan on September 19, 1872.[22] Pratt is reportedly responsible for the design of the Bay City Traction and Electric steam generating plant constructed in 1893.

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When Pratt first arrived in Bay City, the leading architectural firm was Porter and Watkins. Porter and Watkins focused on large commercial commissions thus the smaller residential projects were taken on by Pratt. In 1874 Pratt provided free of charge the design for a small church for the Society of St. Stanislaus. Following this he was awarded several commissions for rural churches and town halls, although the majority of his work remained residences and small commercial buildings in Bay City.[23] In 1880 Pratt's firm became Pratt & Koeppel, when the firm's draftsman, Walter O. Koeppel, was made a partner.

The Sage Library in West Bay City is one of the significant buildings in the city associated with Pratt & Koeppel. While the firm is frequently named as designer of the Library the building was actually designed by Charles Babcock, Dean of Architecture at Cornell University. Henry Sage hired the firm of Pratt & Koeppel to supervise the construction of the building in 1883.

Regardless, Pratt & Koeppel benefited from this association and the firm was asked in 1883 to design the St. James Roman Catholic Church in Bay City. Pratt & Koeppel's design was highly acclaimed and the firm subsequently provided designs for the Westminster Presbyterian Church (1886), the First Presbyterian Church (1891), the Broadway Baptist Church (1892), and St. Stanislaus Church (1892). Each design was distinct and brought additional accolades to the firm of Pratt & Koeppel.[24]

The most important project attributed to Pratt & Koeppel is the Bay City Hall (1891-1897). Considered one of the finest civic structures in Michigan, the building is a Richardson Romanesque style structure. It was also during this period that the firm of Pratt and Koeppel reportedly provided the design of the Bay City Traction and Electric Power Station (1893).[25]

By the turn of the century the lumber boom was over as were the large civic projects associated with the era. Pratt and Koeppel continued to receive commissions for churches, but the designs of this period were less elaborate than earlier efforts. Mr. Koeppel died in 1912 and the firm was reorganized and continued as Pratt, Bickel & Campbell until the firm was disbanded in 1915. Pratt continued to accept occasional commissions until his death in 1923. Most of the original Pratt & Koeppel linen drawings, including plans for the Bay City Traction and Electric Company Power Station, were bleached and recycled as powder bags during World War I. Original paper documents associated with the firm have also been destroyed.[26]

SIGNIFICANCE

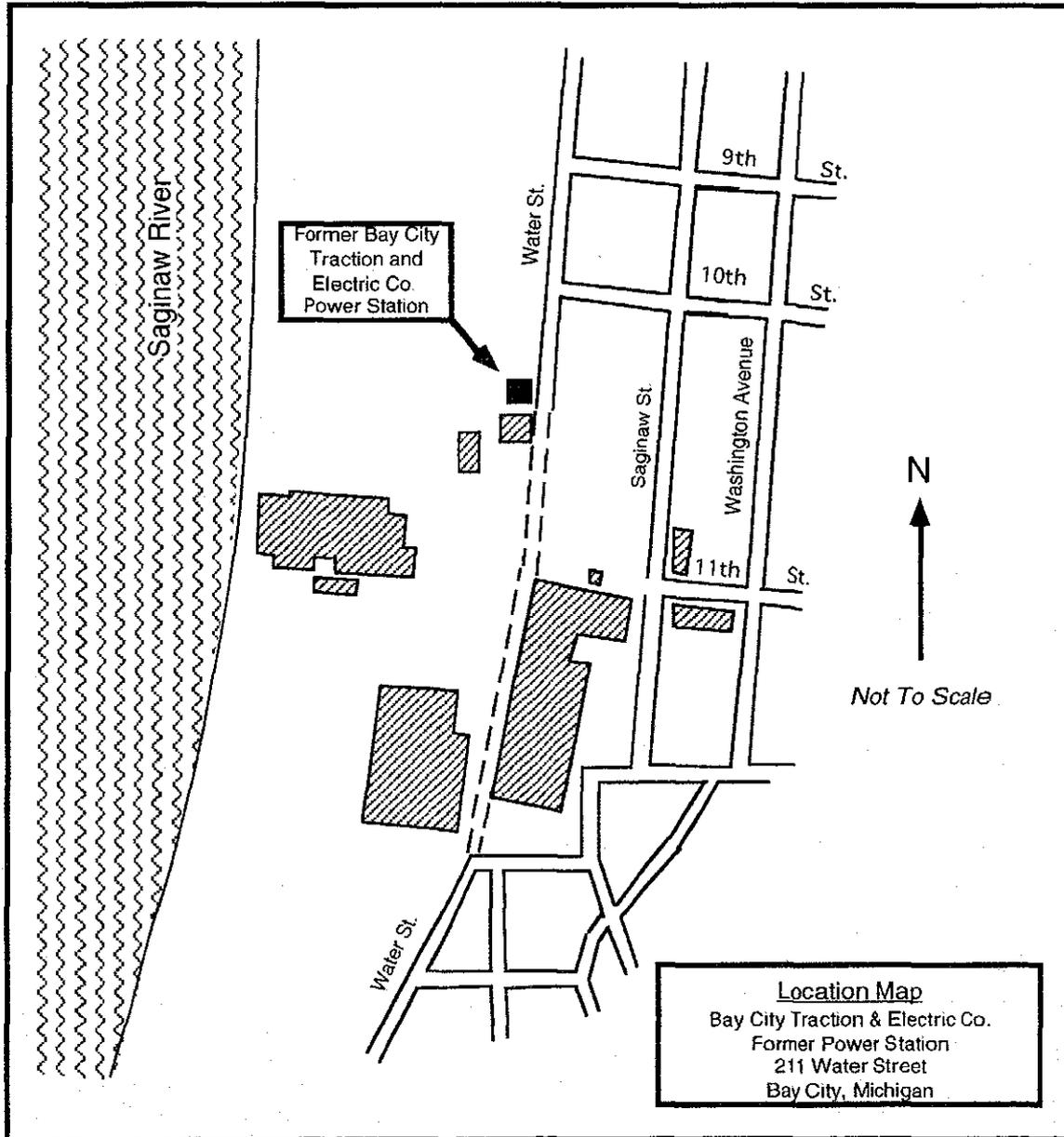
From 1893 to 1919 electric streetcars were operated successfully in Bay City by the Bay City Traction and Electric Company and its successors. Founded in 1893, Bay City Traction and Electric Company became an operating company controlled by the Saginaw Bay City Railway & Light Company, incorporated in 1903. By 1910, the Bay City Power Company absorbed the electric properties of the Bay City Traction and Electric Company.[27] The Power Station Building was constructed by the Bay City Traction and Electric Company as a steam generating plant providing power for interurban electric traction transportation. Although the building has been substantially altered and has been used as an electrical substation, a boat building and storage facility and is currently empty and gutted, the former power station represents a brief but important 30 year period of electric traction power utilized for mass transportation in Michigan cities.

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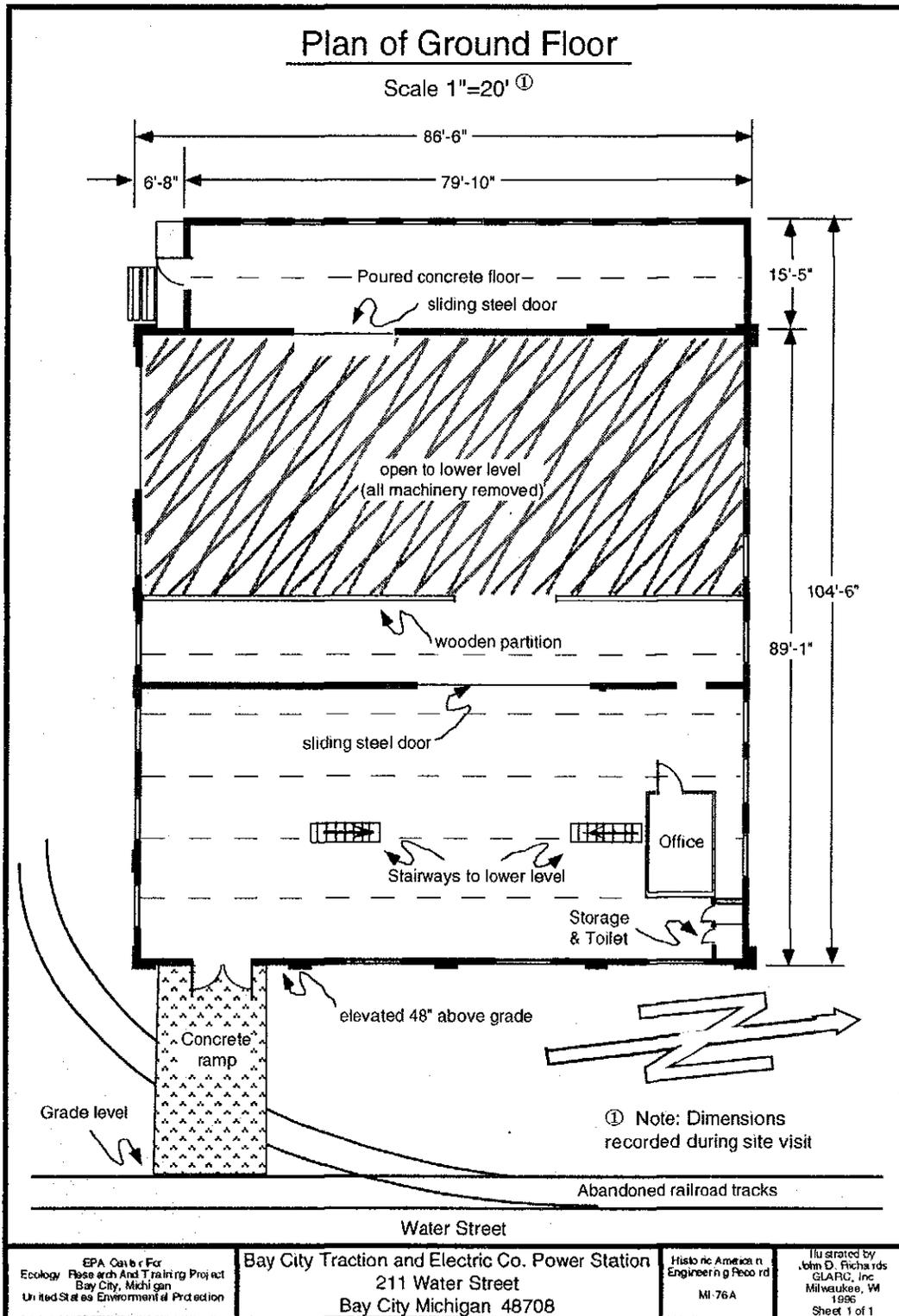
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ENDNOTES

- 1 Vine Deloria, Jr. and Kirke Kickingbird, Treaties and Agreements of the Chippewa Indians. Washington, D.C.: The Institute for the Development of Indian Law, 1973, p. 28-29.
- 2 Truman B. Fox, History of Saginaw County from the Year 1819 Down to the Present Time. East Saginaw, Michigan: Enterprise Print, 1858, p. 34.
- 3 United States Department of State, Comparison of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States. Sixth Census (1840). Washington, D.C.: 1841.
- 4 George E. Butterfield, Bay County Past and Present: Centennial Edition, 1957, p. 44.
- 5 Jeremy W. Kilar, Michigan's Lumbertowns - Lumbermen and Laborers in Saginaw, Bay City, and Muskegon, 1870-1905, 1990, p. 36.
- 6 Leslie E. Arndt, The Bay County Story - From Footpaths to Freeways, 1982, p. 215.
- 7 Christopher Marzonie, et. al., Phase IB Architectural Survey of the Proposed United States Environmental Agency Center for Ecology Research and Training, Bay City, Michigan, 1993, p. 11.
- 8 Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1875-1876. Detroit: R.L. Polk and Company, 1875, p. 117.
- 9 George E. Butterfield, Bay County Past and Present: Centennial Edition, 1957, p. 128.
- 10 George Bush, Future Builders: The Story of Michigan's Consumers Power Company. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973, p. 100.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 George E. Butterfield, Bay County Past and Present: Centennial Edition, 1957, p. 128.
- 13 Leslie E. Arndt, The Bay County Story, 1983, p. 214.
- 14 George Bush, Future Builders: The Story of Michigan's Consumers Power Company, p. 475.
- 15 Leslie E. Arndt, The Bay County Story, 1983, p. 218.
- 16 George Bush, Future Builders: The Story of Michigan's Consumers Power Company, p. 206.
- 17 George E. Butterfield, Bay County Past and Present: Centennial Edition, 1957, p. 130.
- 18 Marzonie, Christopher, et al., Phase IB Architectural Survey of the Proposed United States Environmental Agency Center for Ecology Research and Training, Bay City, Michigan. Report R-0163: Jackson, Michigan, Commonwealth Cultural Resources Group, Inc., 1993, p. 26.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Harris, Cyril M., Historic Architecture Sourcebook. New York: McGrall-Hill Book Company, 1977, p. 137; Harris, Cyril M., Dictionary of Architecture & Construction. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1993, p. 214.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Wolicki, Dale Patrick, Biography of Pratt & Koeppe, Architects. Unpublished manuscript on file at Bay County Historical Society, 1995, p. 1.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., p. 2.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.

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- 27 Bush, George, Future Builders: The Story of Michigan's Consumers Power Company:
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ADDENDUM TO:
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FIELD RECORDS

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