S-500 c. 1915
Metompkin Bay Oyster Company
Crisfield
Private

The Metompkin Bay Oyster Company occupies a significant common bond brick structure located on the Crisfield waterfront that was erected initially as a warehouse for the A. B. Cochrane Lumber Company. Even at that time, according to the Sanborn Insurance maps, part of the common bond brick structure was used for oyster shucking. The entire structure was converted to seafood processing when the Metompkin Bay Oyster Company was established in 1940. The company purchased the building and adapted it to their needs. A concrete floor was poured throughout the multi-room structure. Along with the C. W. Howeth and Brother building next door, which is also used by the Metompkin firm, the two packinghouses are the only ones still used in a long row of packinghouses structures that define the Crisfield waterfront northwest of the main dock.

The Metompkin Bay Oyster Company, named after the Metompkin Bay on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, was established in Crisfield in 1940 by Ira Thomas Todd, Lemuel T. Nelson, and Gordys Sterling. The seafood packinghouse was acquired formally in January 1945. It was located on Dock Street in the converted warehouse of the A. B. Cochrane lumber company, in which they poured a concrete floor. Over time the company became a major crabmeat processing house with hand picking, machine picking, and brine flotation lines for production, with oysters becoming a side line. They expanded into the adjacent C. W. Howeth & Bro. building next door, which the firm acquired in 1992. The company began freezing some of their seafood products in the late 1940s. They added a new soft crab processing plant in the 1980s that operates seasonally. In 2000 the company processed and packed frozen and canned crabmeat and oysters under the brand names, "Metompkin" and "Howeth."

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of
Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. S-500

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Metompkin Bay Oyster Company

other

2. Location

street and number N. 11th Street __ not for publication

city, town Crisfield vicinity

county Somerset

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

name Metompkin Bay Oyster Company, Inc.

street and number P. O. Box 671 telephone 410-968-0660

city, town Crisfield state Maryland zip code 21817

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Somerset County Clerk of Court liber ITP 373 & 403 folio 581 & 889

city, town Princess Anne tax map 102 tax parcels 15 & 17 tax ID number 7-126298

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
__ district
x building(s)
__ structure
__ site
__ object

Ownership
__ public
x private
__ both

Current Function
__ agriculture
__ commerce/trade
__ defense
__ domestic
__ education
__ funerary
__ government
__ health care
x industry
__ landscape
__ recreation/culture
__ religion
__ social
__ transportation
__ work in progress
__ unknown
__ vacant/not in use
__ other:

Resource Count

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	____	buildings
____	____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	____	Total

Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory

_____

7. Description

Inventory No. S-500

Condition

___ excellent ___ deteriorated
x__ good ___ ruins
___ fair ___ altered

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

The Metompkin Bay Oyster Company occupies a large warehouse type structure located between Hearn's Alley, also known as 11th Street, and Dock Street on the Annemessex River in the City of Crisfield, Somerset County, Maryland. The large ell-shaped main block faces southwest with the principal gable roof oriented on a northeast/southwest axis.

Built around 1915, the thirteen-bay rectangular common bond brick and concrete front section of the packinghouse is built largely of a greyish-white brick with a variety of repairs and additions in red brick or concrete block. Supported on driven pilings, the brick packinghouse has a concrete floor, and the walls rise to a medium pitched gable roof covered with asphalt shingles. Attached to the back of the main block is a two-story ell wing, and the inner corner of the two-story packinghouse is infilled with a single-story shed roofed section erected in the same greyish-white brick. Extending southeast from the c. 1915 building is a single story concrete block addition of modern construction, and it is covered with a metal roof. The building was partly damaged in a 1975 fire that required rebuilding the roof.

The southwest (main) wall of the packinghouse is laid in six-course common bond with an enclosed shed roofed frame addition sheltering the first floor double wide entrances into the storage areas with large coolers. The frame shed roofed addition was built with three separate roof sections that so a second floor freight entrance was not partially covered. The second story of the main block, used largely for storage with a corner space obligated as an office, is defined by an uneven series of two-pane window openings set with rectangular openings. Many of the window openings have been reworked with modern brick. The third bay from the southeast corner is pierced by a door opening. Between the ten and eleventh bays is a single flue brick stove chimney, which corresponds with the location of an inner concrete block bearing wall that rises through the main building and is finished with a stepped parapet. Two of the bays west of the stack have been altered with the insertion of a rectangular picture window. The building abuts the old C. W. Howeth & Bro. packinghouse with a parapet wall finishing the gable end.

The southeast gable end is a part brick, part concrete block wall. Above the second story level the wall is laid in concrete blocks, and the top of the wall surface is finished with a stepped parapet. A shed roofed porch supported on metal framing is attached to the concrete block wall surface above the single-story concrete block east gable end addition.

Extending northeast of the front block is a two-story, common bond brick ell wing that is three bays across with center double door entrances on the north wall providing access to the first and second floors. Replacement windows are located to each side. The gable end is finished with a parapet wall topped with a terra cotta cap. The inside surface of the two-story ell-shaped building is infilled with a single-story, shed roofed brick section also erected in the greyish-white brick with modified wall surface. Metal conveyors protrude through the wall surface for removing shucked shells from inside. The shed roof of the single-story section is interrupted by a parapet wall of concrete block that corresponds with the intermediate bearing wall of the front section. Mid to late twentieth-century concrete block additions, both attached and free-standing, are located behind the brick packinghouse.

The interior consists of a range of shucking rooms located at the west and north side of the building, whereas the east end is used largely for temporary storage of oysters in burlap bags on pallets. Large coolers are also

located at various sites within the structure. The office is reached by way of an enclosed staircase that rises in the north ell wing.

8. Significance

Inventory No. S-500

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

Specific dates 1940 **Architect/Builder**

Construction dates

Evaluation for:

_____ National Register _____Maryland Register ____x____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.)

The Metompkin Bay Oyster Company occupies a significant common bond brick structure on the Crisfield waterfront that was erected initially as a warehouse for the A. B. Cochrane Lumber Company. Even at that time, according to the Sanborn Insurance maps, part of the common bond brick structure was used for oyster shucking. The entire structure was converted to seafood processing when Metompkin Bay Oyster Company was established in 1940. The company purchased the building and adapted it for their needs. A concrete floor was poured throughout the multi-room structure. Along with the C. W. Howeth & Bro. building next door, which is also used by the Metompkin firm, the two packinghouses are the only ones used in a long row of brick packinghouse structures that define the Crisfield waterfront west of the main dock.

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

The Metompkin Bay Oyster Company, named after Metompkin Bay on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, was established in Crisfield, Maryland, in 1940 by Ira Thompson Todd, Lemuel T. Nelson and Gordys Sterling. The seafood packinghouse was acquired formally in January 1945.[1] It was located on Dock Street in the converted warehouse of the A. B. Cochrane lumber company, in which they poured a concrete floor. Over time the company became a major crabmeat processing house with hand picking, machine picking and brine flotation lines for production, with oysters becoming a side line. They expanded into the adjacent C. W. Howeth & Bros. building, which they acquired in 1992.[2] The company began freezing some of their seafood products in the late 1940s. They added a new soft crab processing plant in the 1980s that operates seasonally. In 2000 the company processed and packed frozen and canned crabmeat and oysters under the brand names, "Metompkin" and "Howeth."

The company was one of the stockholders in the Packers Ice & Cold Storage Company, organized in 1946 that provided 110,000 cubic square feet of cold storage space to the seafood packers of Crisfield. This was not financially successful as small affordable ice making machines replaced the need for a central storage facility. Eventually government regulations required businesses to produce their own ice and to have their

[1] Somerset County Land Record, 128/471, January 11, 1945.
[2] Somerset County Land Record, 403/889, April 22, 1992.

own coolers and freezers.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, the seafood workers in Crisfield successfully organized and formed Seafood Workers Local #453 of the Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcher Workman AFL union. Metompkin Bay Oyster Company's workers were part of this movement, as were some of the local watermen. In 1942, The United Oysterman's Union 19600 of the CIO negotiated an employment agreement with Lemuel T. Nelson and Gordon Sterling, co-partners trading as Metompkin Bay Oyster Company.[3] In 1943, Metompkin Bay employee Joel Jones was selected as a shop steward of the new Local #453.[4] The following year, in 1944, the union representing Metompkin's 26 employees (12 men and 14 women) requested a raise of 10 cents per cup for shucking oysters, an increase to 60 cents per hour. Dealers in Baltimore at this time were paying 50 cents an hour. Negotiations deadlocked on a renewed contract on wages and the issue of a closed shop. A majority of the Crisfield packers agreed to the wage increase for the shuckers and packing-room help.[5]

In December 1944 another dispute between 27 oyster packing companies in Crisfield and Seafood Workers Union Local 453 threatened a strike. The employers were accused of trying to increase the size of the measuring cup used for shucked oysters in compliance with a directive of the Department of Tidewater Fisheries of the State of Maryland. Early in December 1944 all of the employers were arrested and convicted of violations of Article 72, Section 90 of the Maryland Code, which allegedly required the use of a 9 pint measuring cup, and all the cases were appealed. The employers were paying 60 cents for an 8 pint cup and were willing to pay 67 ½ cents for a 9 pint cup, but the Union would not agree to the use of a 9 pint cup contending that the Maryland law was optional and not mandatory.[6]

The Seafood Union won an election in Crisfield in 1948 that authorized the establishment of a Union shop in the seafood plants with union contracts. At the Metompkin Bay Oyster Company, 45 employees voted in favor of the Union with no one voting against.[7] A year later, a group of Crisfield packinghouse owners, including Metompkin Bay, proposed that wage rates be reduced for oyster shucking. The main argument presented by the employers during the hearing was that their competitors whose employees were not organized were enjoying lower rates, paying their workers 80 cents a gallon. The controversy went to an arbitration board and the decision was to continue present rates of 85 cents per gallon.[8]

The company began picking crabs in 1947-48. Captain Ira T. Todd met a tragic death in 1950 during a

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[3] U. S. Department of Labor, United States Conciliation Service, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
[4] *The Butcher Workman*, December 1943, p. 5.
[5] U.S. Department of Labor, United States Conciliation Service, Office of Regional Supervisor, Baltimore, Maryland, September 5, 1944, Case No. 442-2230, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
[6] U.S. Department of Labor, United States Conciliation Service, Office of Regional Supervisor, Baltimore, Maryland, December 20, 1944, File No. 442-3312, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
[7] *The Butcher Workman*, May 1948, p. 6
[8] *The Butcher Workman*, November 1949, p. 2.

storm while trying to secure one of his boats at the waterfront dock.[9] At the time of his death, he was a director of the Watermen's Seafood Association, a member of the Seafood Packers Association, and a member of the advisory board of the Atlantic States Marine Compact Commission.[10]

Ira T. Todd, Jr. began working for the company when he got out of the Army in 1945-46. He became owner and operator of the business in 1950. His sons Casey and Michael joined the company in the 1970s.[11] In 1965, I. T. Todd, Jr. was partner and manager of the company, employing 30 men and 40 women in processing and packing crabmeat, soft crabs, and oysters.[12] A fire in 1975 burned the roof adjacent to the second floor office in the main packinghouse.

Employment held steady with 70 employees in 1977 and 75 employees in 1983.[13] In the 1980s the company acquired a mechanized crab-picker that could pick 100 pounds of meat an hour, the equal of 20 human pickers. There were high hopes for this machine because machine-picked crabmeat had a much lower bacteria count than hand-picked meat. However, the machines did not pick efficiently and have never replaced human workers.[14]

In 1987, the company struggled to find enough seafood to process and brought in oysters from Louisiana, Alabama and Washington State to keep the plant busy.[15] In 1989 Casey Todd told a meeting of the Maryland and Virginia Sea Grant Colleges that the seafood industry needed a product to keep their operations going year around. He said that they could readily convert the plants to processing other products such as hybrid striped bass and that he supported any aquaculture initiatives that would provide the raw product that packinghouse owners could produce, market and distribute.[16] In the 1990s the company worked with a Japanese distributor to sell frozen soft crabs to Japan and to buy soft crabs from Thailand and crabmeat from Indonesia to sell in the United States. They also hired 10-12 Mexican workers under the Federal H-2B non-agricultural guest worker program in response to the local labor shortage. In 2000 Casey Todd was president of the company with a year-round work force of 100. Today, 90 percent of Maryland crabs are sold as live hard crabs to crab houses and restaurants around the Bay, with Baltimore the biggest customer. This is good for the waterman but means there is little left to be picked as fresh crabmeat. The company only

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[9] Woodrow T. Wilson, *Crisfield, Maryland, 1676-1976*, Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1977, p. 407.
[10] *The Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia*, Vol. III, 1950, p. 270.
[11] Conversation with I. T. Todd, Jr., December 10, 2001, Crisfield, Maryland.
[12] *Directory of the Maryland Manufacturers 1965-1966*, Maryland Department of Economic Development, p. 235.
[13] *Directory of the Maryland Manufacturers 1983-1984*, Maryland Department of Economic and Community Development, p. 295.
[14] Conversation with I.T. Todd, Jr., December 10, 2001, Crisfield, Maryland.
[15] "Schaefer Examines Lower Shore Seafood Industry On Its Sick Bed," *Star Democrat*, March 24, 1987.
[16] Donald Webster, Donald Meritt and George J. Flick, *Aquaculture in Maryland & Virginia*, Maryland Sea Grant College, Virginia Sea Grant College, 1989, p. 25.

handles crabs for six to eight weeks a year, particularly in the fall when crabs are plentiful, of best quality, and cheaper. They once picked crabmeat ten to eleven months a year, purchasing crabs in Virginia and the Carolinas.[17]

[17] Conversation with I. T. Todd, Jr, December 10, 2001, Crisfield, Maryland.

Metompkin Bay Oyster Company, Inc.
Crisfield, Somerset County, Maryland
Chain of title

Map 102, Parcel 15

ITP 373/581	Michael Wellington Todd Casey Ira Todd
	to
3/15/1988	Metompkin Bay Oyster Company, Inc. ...beginning at the corner of Hearn's Alley and Broad Street. Plat book 15/58
	Conveyed in two deeds: 1. from Ira T. Todd, Jr., 4/12/1977, ITP 299/772 2. from Wharton Bros., Inc., 2/17/1978, ITP 305/735
1. ITP 299/772	Ira T. Todd, Jr.
	to
4/12/1977	Michael Wellington Todd Casey Ira Todd
	Parcel II on the Annemessex conveyed to grantor by the following deeds: 1. from A. B. Cochrane Co., 128/471, 2. from Gordon C. Sterling, 166/351 3. from A. B. Cochrane Co., 171/410 4. from Lorenzo T. Nelson, GJB 198/518 5. from A. B. Cochrane Company, 205/478 6. from Wade D. Ward, trustee, ITP 224/620, 11/9/1964

128/471	A. B. Cochrane Company
	to
1/11/1945	Gordon C. Sterling and Margaret Sterling, his wife, 1/3 interest; Martha Nelson, 1/3 interest; Ira T. Todd, Jr. 1/6 interest and Evelyn A. Todd, 1/6 interest
	155' front on Annemessex and 175' back from waterfront to 11th Street being land conveyed to the said A. B. Cochrane Company from L. D. Standford, receiver, 8/27/1910, 54/499, Muir & Company sales
	$19,500

Map 102, Parcel 17

ITP 403/889	Charles W. Howeth & Bros., Inc.
	to
4/22/1992	Metompkin Bay Oyster Company, Inc.
ITP 337/616	William C. Tyler Erma Tyler
	to
5/2/1983	Charles W. Howeth & Bros. $256,683
ITP 336/414	William C. Tyler, Sr. Mildred Frances Tyler
	to
2/14/1983	William C. Tyler Erma Tyler

ITP 198/576	Charles W. Howeth, Cordelia Howeth, Marian Howeth, widow, Robert W. Howeth, Jr. and Jetta Howeth
	to
5/9/1960	William C. Tyler, Jr. ½ undivided interest Mildred Frances Tyler William Thomas Walston Hilda Marie Walton ½ undivided interest "Oyster House Lot"
BFL 36/250	Last Will and Testament of Robert Howeth
	to
10/29/1958	Marian S. Howeth Robert W. Howeth, Jr.
BLB 131/458	Ralph Riggin, et al. (Alma Riggin, Lloyd Riggin, Elsie Riggin, Bank of Crisfield and the Marine Bank of Crisfield
	to
4/19/1945	Robert W. Howeth

49/71	Abednego R. Crockett, et al. (Lillian J. Crockett)
	to
4/30/1907	Ralph Riggin and Lloyd Riggin $3,000 all that lot or parcel on the East side of the Little Annemessex at the northwest corner of the property on which stands the mill of W. C. Muir & Co., thence by and with the mill property to Hearn Street

HFL 8/129 N. Walter Dixon, trustee

to

6/14/1890 Abednego R. Crockett
L. James Riggin
John T. Sterling

...and a part of the real estate described to said Abednego R. Crockett and L. James Riggin from Thomas Conner, 5/27/1886, HFL 4/240

9. Major Bibliographical References

Inventory No. S-500

Sanborn Insurance Maps, various issues, microfilm at the Nabb Research Center of Delmarva History & Culture.
Somerset County Land Records, various volumes, Somerset County Courthouse.
(For full list of resouces see footnotes)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property	30,404 square feet		
Acreage of historical setting	30,404 square feet		
Quadrangle name	Crisfield, Maryland	Quadrangle scale:	1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

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

11. Form Prepared by

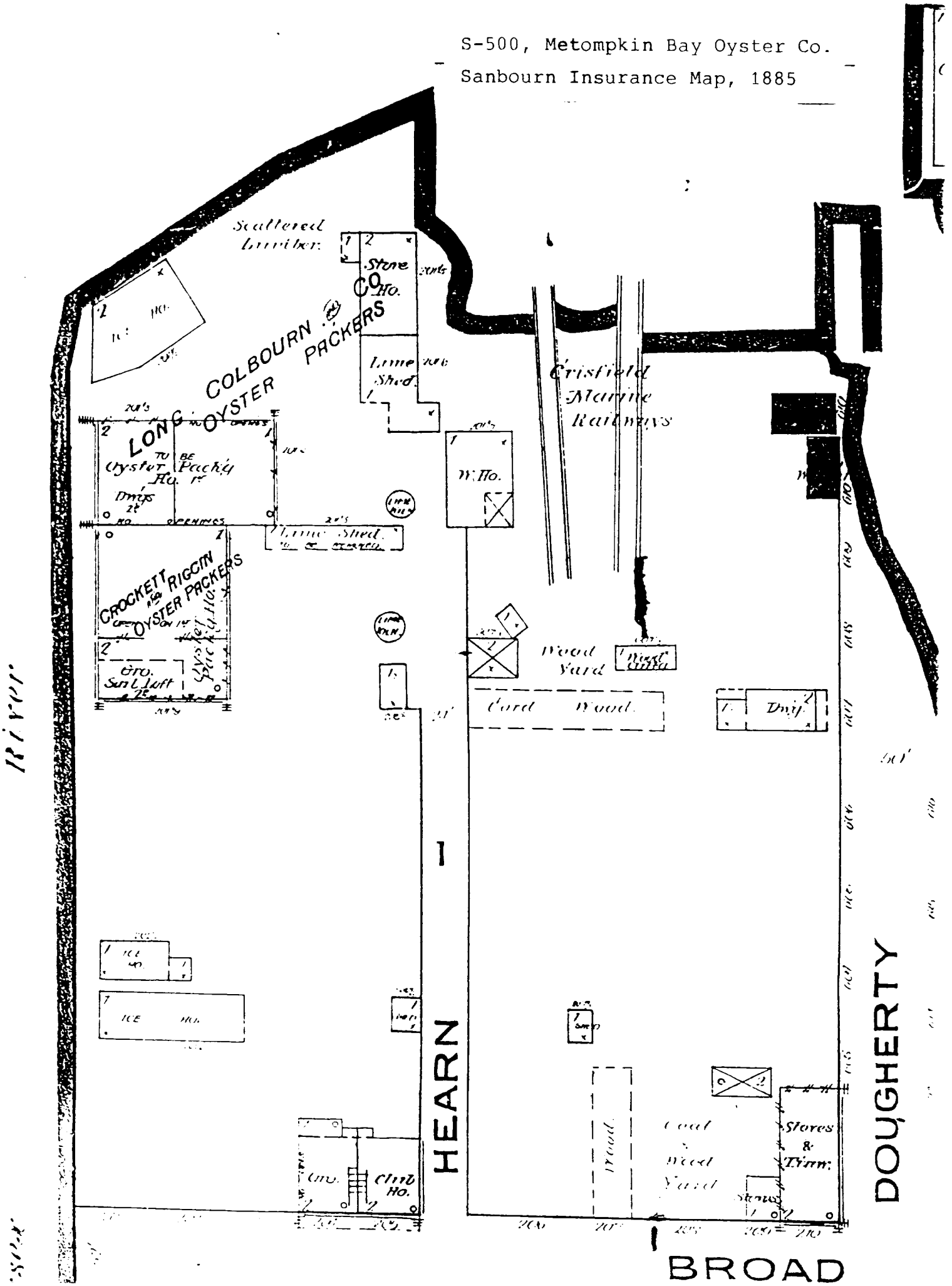
name/title	Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian and Virginia Jenkins, Business Historian, CBMM		
organization	Private Consultant	date	12/10/2001
street & number	P. O. Box 5	telephone	410-651-1094
city or town	Westover	state	Maryland 21871

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.

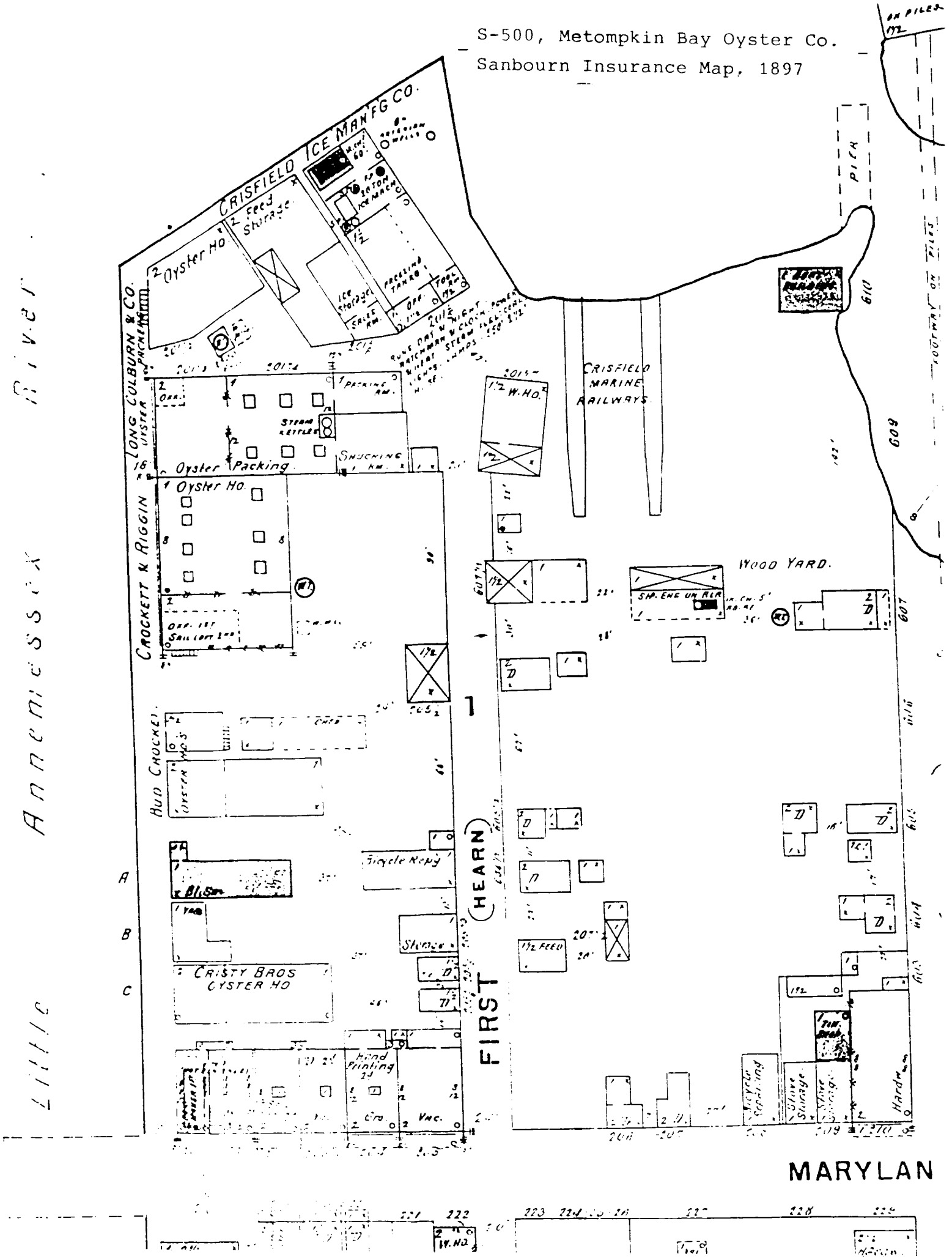
The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
DHCD/DHCP
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

S-500, Metompkin Bay Oyster Co.
Sanbourn Insurance Map, 1885

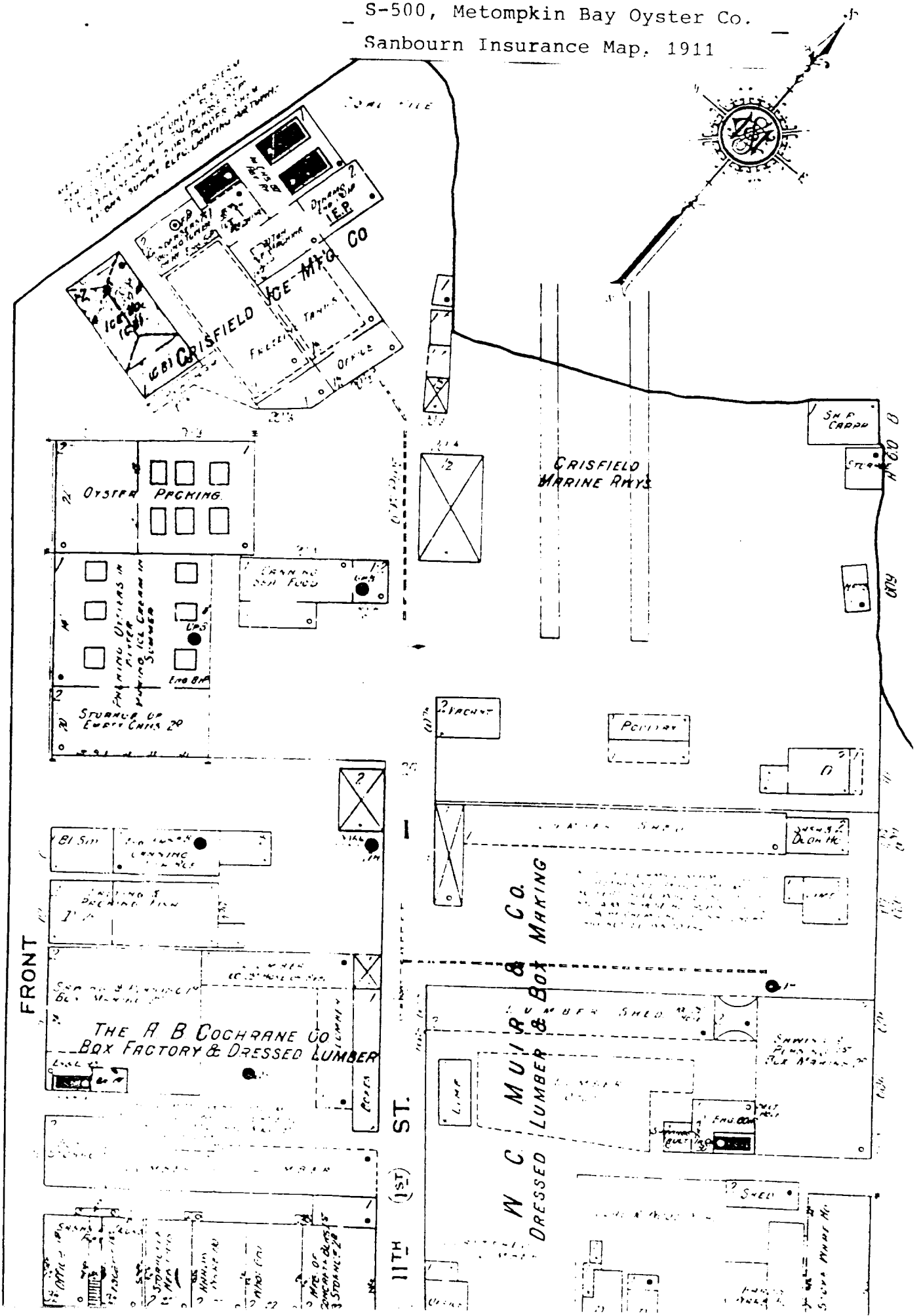


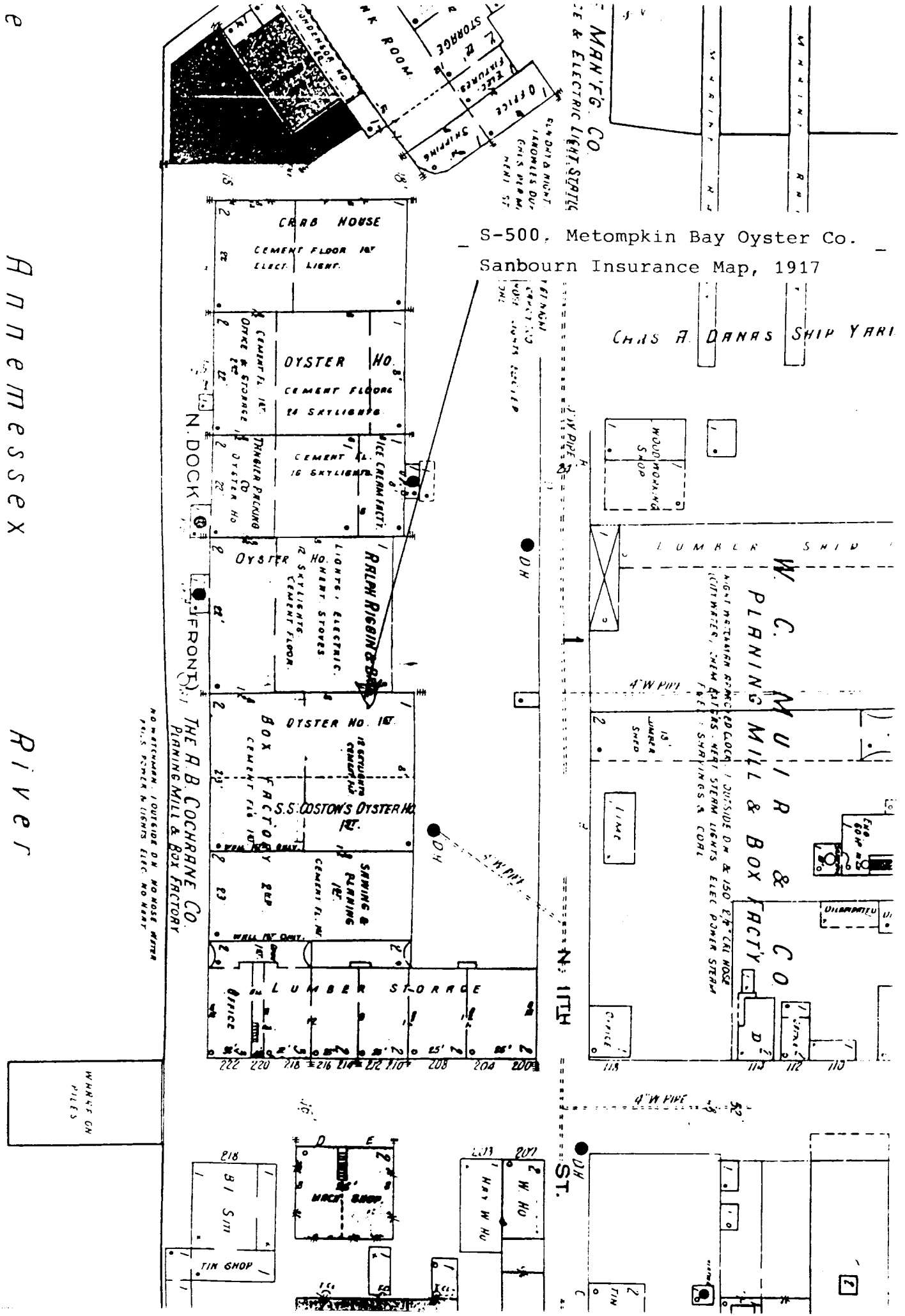
S-500, Metompkin Bay Oyster Co.
Sanbourn Insurance Map, 1897



S-500, Metompkin Bay Oyster Co.

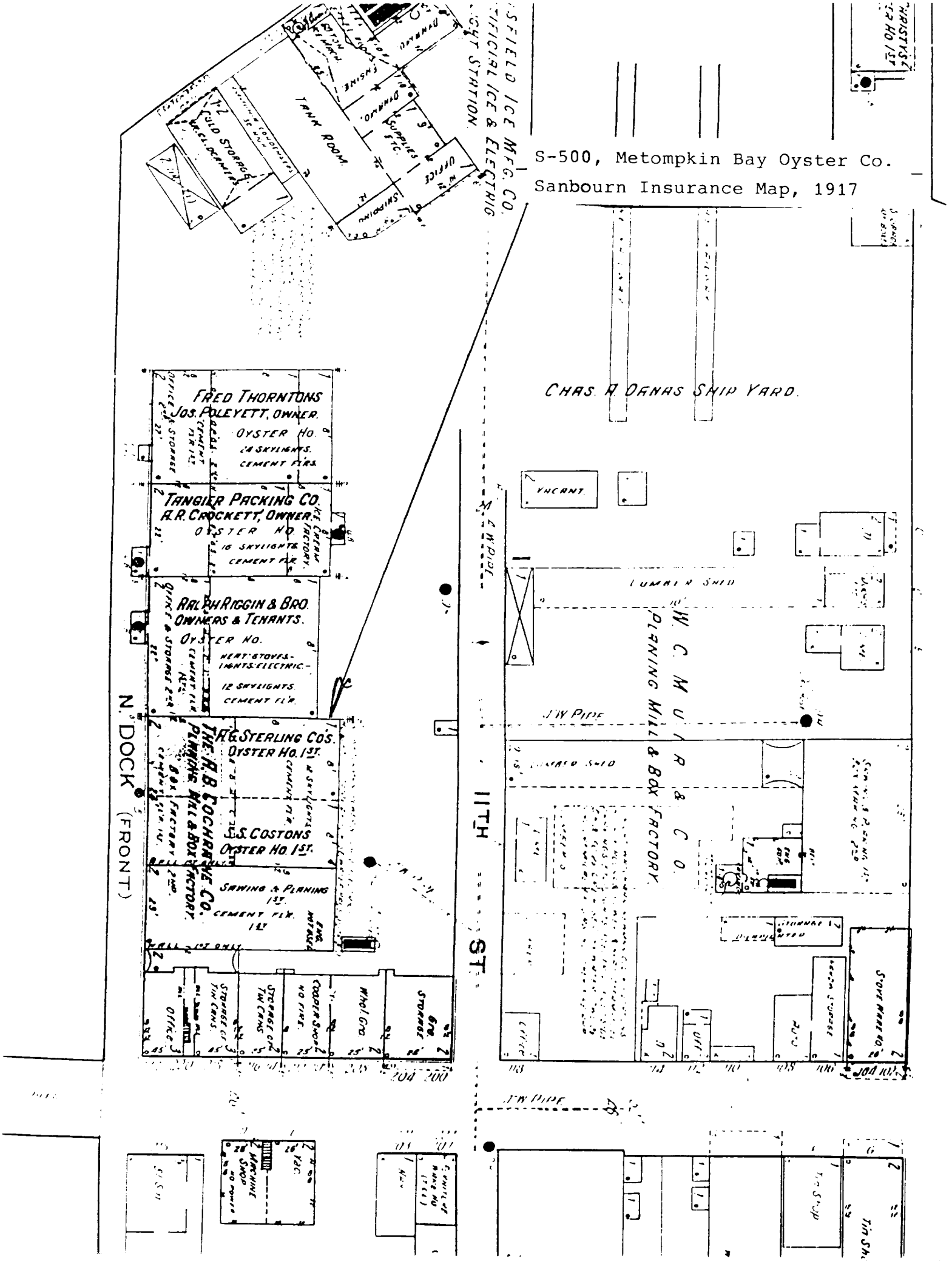
Sanbourn Insurance Map, 1911





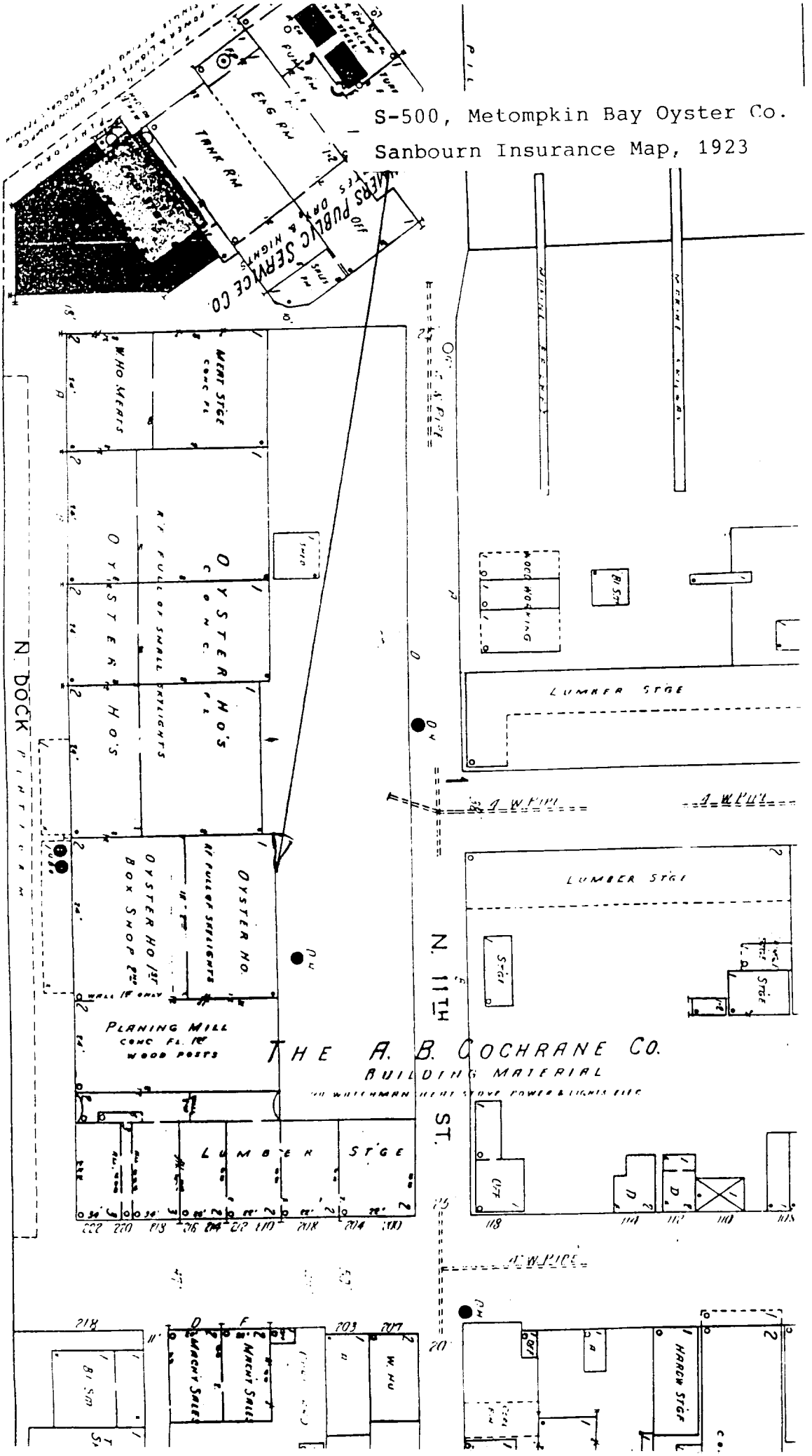
S-500, Metompkin Bay Oyster Co.
Sanbourn Insurance Map, 1917

S-500, Metompkin Bay Oyster Co.
Sanbourn Insurance Map, 1917



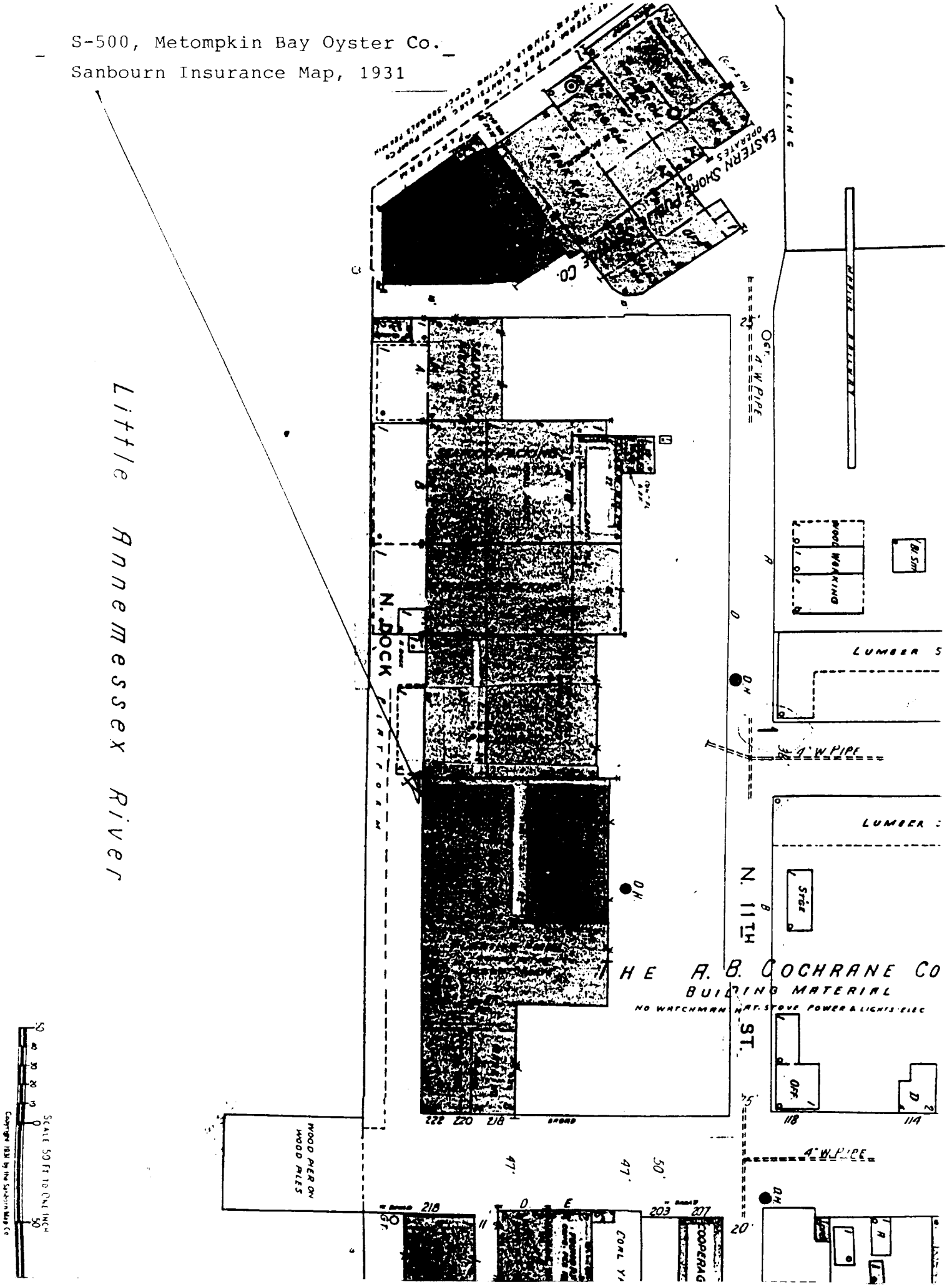
S-500, Metompkin Bay Oyster Co.

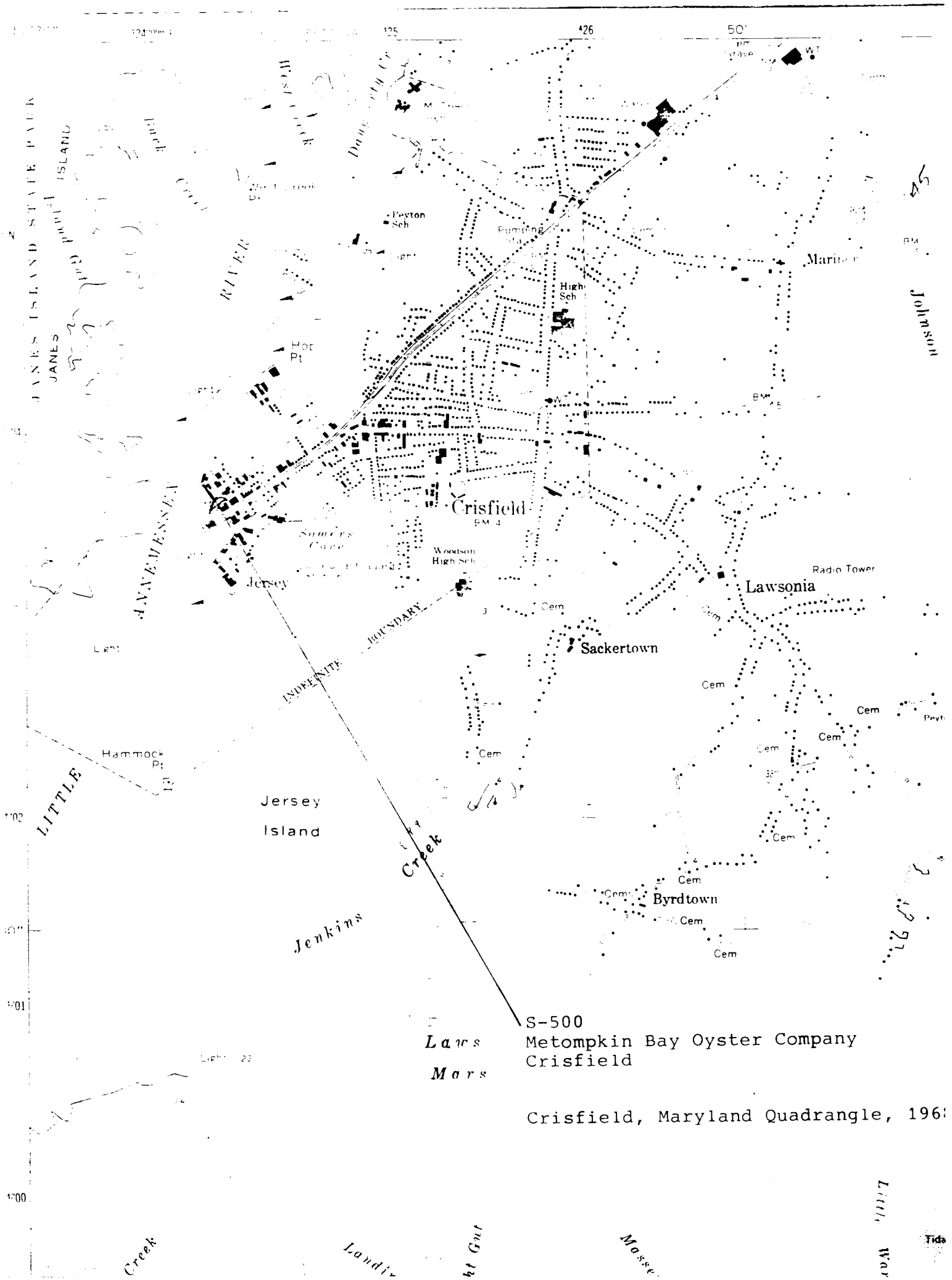
Sanbourn Insurance Map, 1923



S-500, Metompkin Bay Oyster Co.

Sanbourn Insurance Map, 1931





Crisfield, Maryland Quadrangle, 196

S-500

Metompkin Bay Oyster Co.

Crisfield, Somerset Co., MD.

Southwest elevation

12/2001, Paul Touart, photographer

Neg./MD Historical Trust

1 of 6

S-500
Metompkin Bay Oyster Co.,
Crisfield, Somerset Co., Md.
Southwest elevation
12/2001, Paul Touart, photographer
Nec. / Md. Historical Trust

2 of 6

S-500
McTompkin Bay Oyster Co.
Crisfield, Somerset Co., MD.
Southwest elevation
12/2001, Paul Touart, Photographer
MHT/MD. Historical Trust
3 of 6

S-500

McTOMPKIN OYSTER BAY CO

CRISFIELD, SOMERSET CO., MD

NORTHEAST ELEVATION

12/2001, PAUL TOUHEY, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEG./MD HISTORICAL TRUST

4 of 6

elompkin

5-500
METOMPKIN BAY OYSTER CO.
CRISFIELD, SOMERSET CO., MD.
NORTHWEST ELEVATION
12/2001, PAUL TOUHEY, PHOTOGRAPHER
NEH/MD. HISTORICAL TRUST
5 OF 6

S-500

Metompkin Bay Oyster Co

Crisfield, Somerset Co. Md.

Oyster Shucking Room

12/2001, Paul Touart, Photographer

Nes/Md. Historical Trust

6 of 6