

TARR AND WONSON PAINT FACTORY
End of Horton Street
Gloucester
Essex
Massachusetts

HAER MA-166
MA-166

PHOTOGRAPHS

PAPER COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

TARR AND WONSON PAINT FACTORY

HAER No. MA-166

Location: End of Horton Street, Gloucester, Essex County, Massachusetts

Significance: The Tarr and Wonson Paint Factory is significant as the first U.S. manufacturer of copper paint, which was used on the bottom of boats to prevent marine growth. In addition, the factory “is widely recognized in the area and by visitors as an important landmark and gateway to the inner harbor.”¹

Description: The factory sits at the end of the Rocky Neck peninsula and is made up of several masonry and wood structures that total 18,000 square feet. The buildings include the Copper Mill, Boiler/Engine Room, Manufacturing Building, Warehouse Building, Office/Lab Building, and two outbuildings. The Copper Mill (ca. 1877-1879) is a brick structure that sits on a granite foundation and has a slate roof. The brick Boiler/Engine Room (ca. 1878-1880) also has a granite foundation. The wood frame Manufacturing Building (ca. 1879-1881) stands four stories tall and is clad in wood clapboard siding. The paint was mixed and prepared for shipment in this building. The ca. 1884 Warehouse Building is a timber structure that sits on wood piles and is connected to the Manufacturing Building by an overhead bridge. A belfry was added to the warehouse in the 1950s. The brick Office/Lab Building, dating to ca. 1892, sits on a granite foundation and has corrugated steel roofing. Two concrete outbuildings were built ca. 1960 and 1972 and served as storage buildings for fuel oil and solvent. Other alterations included the conversion of the plant from coal to oil in the 1960s.²

History: James G. Tarr and Augustus Wonson established Tarr & Wonson, Ltd. in 1863 and experimented with creating a paint that would protect the bottoms of wooden boats, ultimately settling on a mixture containing copper. The company’s copper paint, as an advertisement stated, was “a perfect substitute for metal sheathing for one year, effectually protecting the bottom from boring of worms, and the adhesion of barnacles, grass, seaweed, moss, etc.”³ Preventing marine growth reduced the travel times of boats, thereby resulting in a savings of time and money. By the 1890s, Tarr and Wonson paint “had been widely recognized as the most effective anti-fouling mixture on the market and was being shipped abroad as well as domestically.”⁴

¹ Congress Group Properties, Mann & Lovell Architects and Planners, “Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory Adaptive Reuse Study,” submitted to The Architectural Conservation Trust (ACT) for Massachusetts, August 1992, p. 9.

² “Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory Adaptive Reuse Study,” pp. 12-21.

³ Advertisement reproduced in “Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory Adaptive Reuse Study,” p. 10.

⁴ “Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory Adaptive Reuse Study,” p. 10.

James Abbott purchased the company in 1954 and operated it until 1979/80 under the name "Gloucester Paints." Rule Industries then assumed ownership of the factory and continued manufacturing paint under the name Gloucester Paints until 1985. The factory stood vacant for a number of years, the subject of a preservation battle, but is now in the process of being preserved and adaptively reused by the Ocean Alliance.⁵

Sources: Congress Group Properties, Mann & Lovell Architects and Planners, "Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory, Adaptive Reuse Study," submitted to The Architectural Conservation Trust (ACT) for Massachusetts, August 1992.

Historian: Data compiled by Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, May 2009

Project

Information: The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) is a long-range program that documents and interprets historically significant engineering sites and structures throughout the United States. HAER is part of Heritage Documentation Programs (Richard O'Connor, Manager), a division of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The HAER Maritime Program is managed by Todd Croteau, HAER Architect. The Gloucester Waterfront Survey project was funded by the Council of American Maritime Museums. John Tagiuri produced the large format photography in 2008.

⁵ "Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory Adaptive Reuse Study," p. 10; "Tarr and Wonson Paint Factory," <http://www.paintfactory.org/index.html>, accessed May 2009.

Appendix A: Images

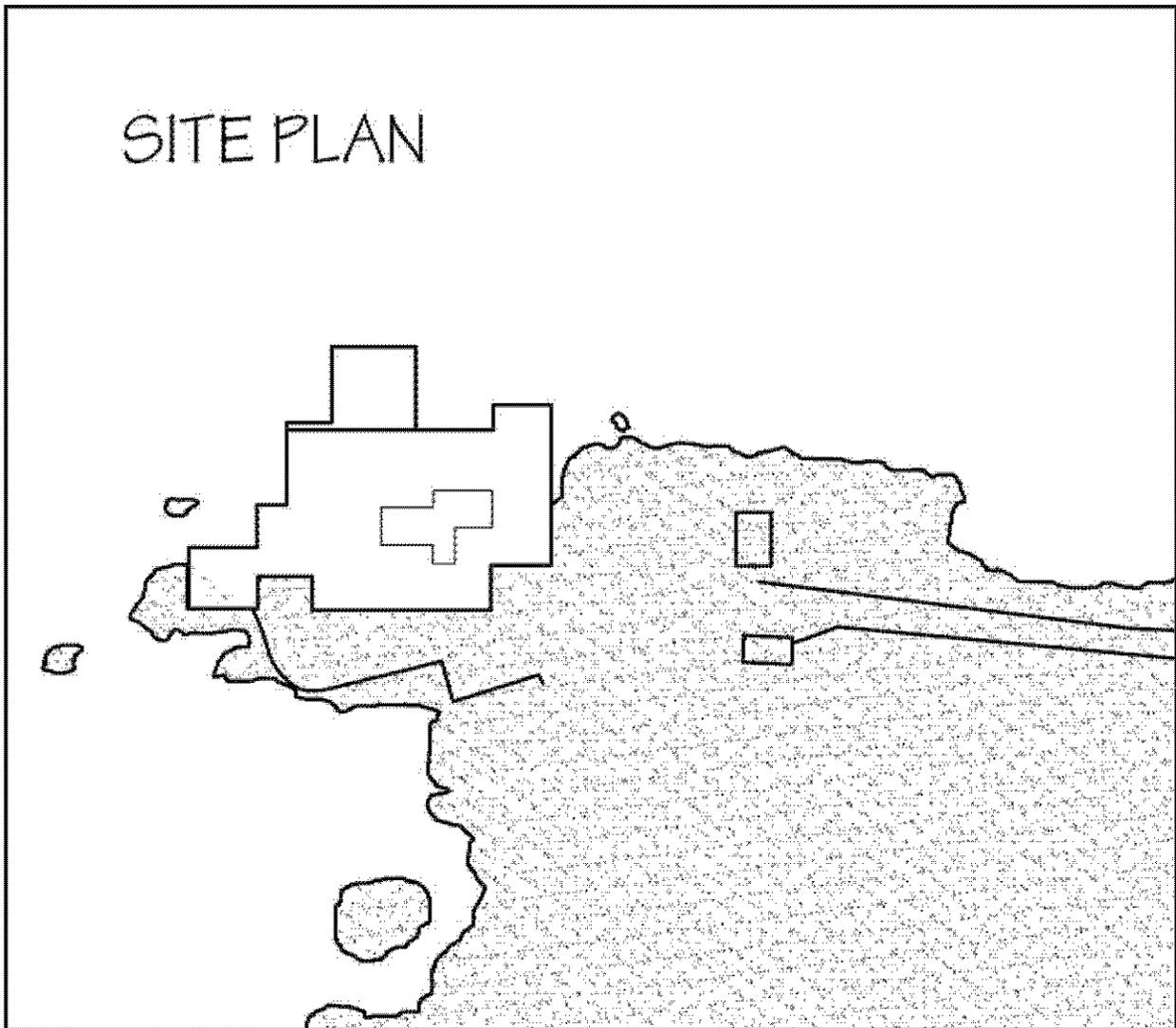


Image 1: Site Plan of Tarr and Wonson Paint Factory. Drawing by Todd Croteau, September 2009, based on drawings in "Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory Adaptive Reuse Study."

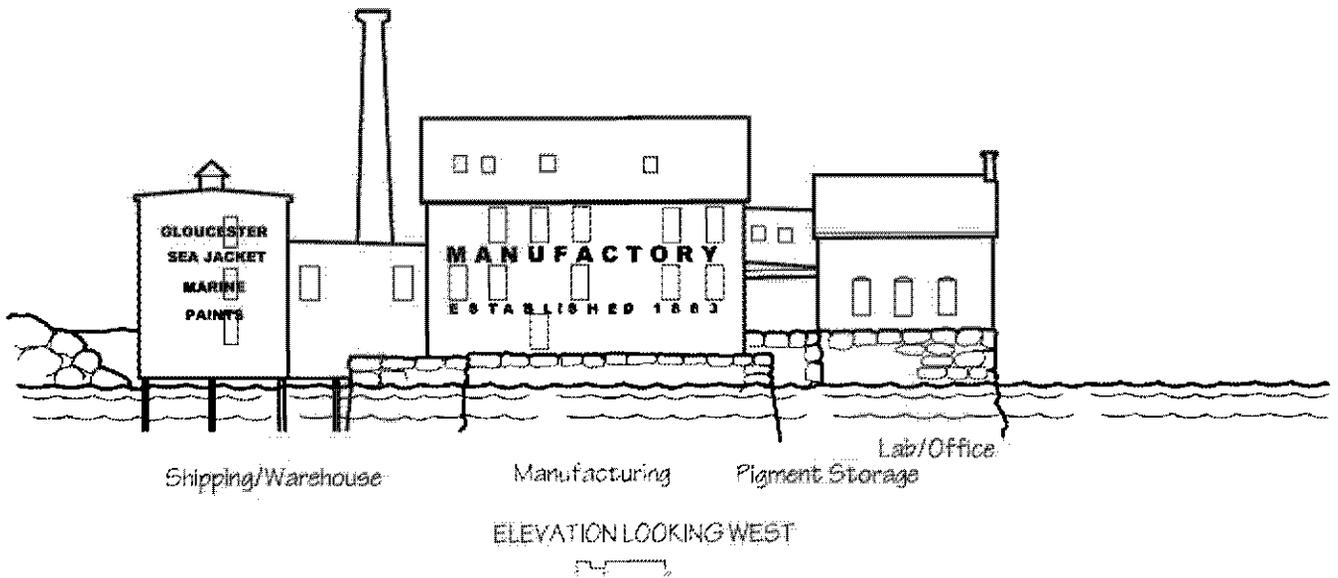
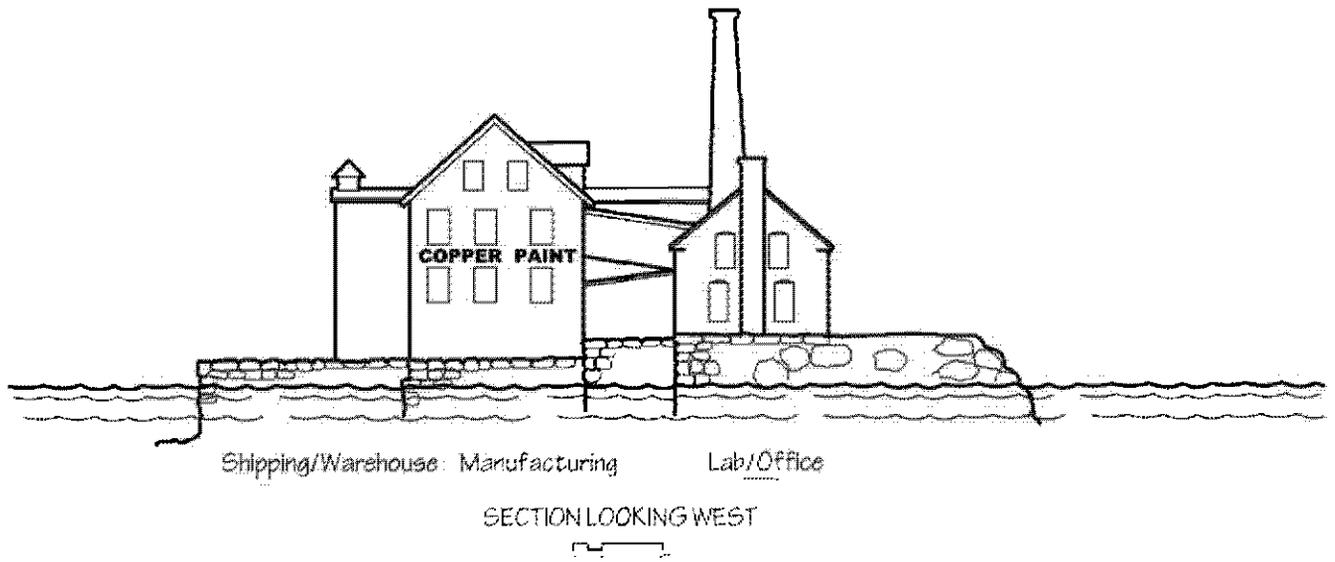


Image 2: Section and Elevation of complex. Drawn by Todd Croteau, September 2009, based on drawings in "Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory Adaptive Reuse Study."

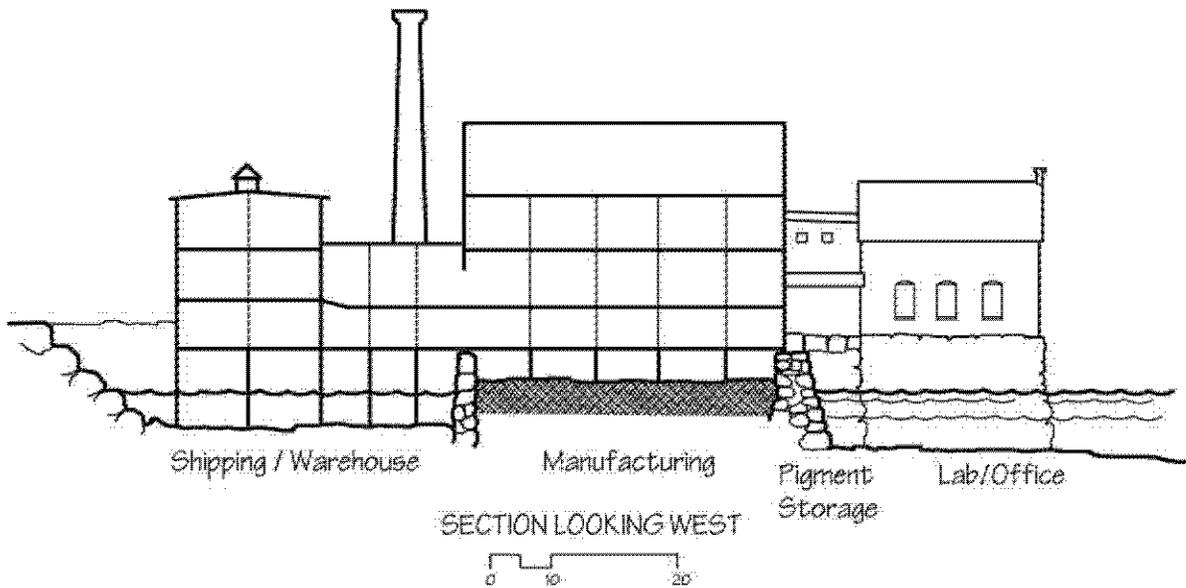
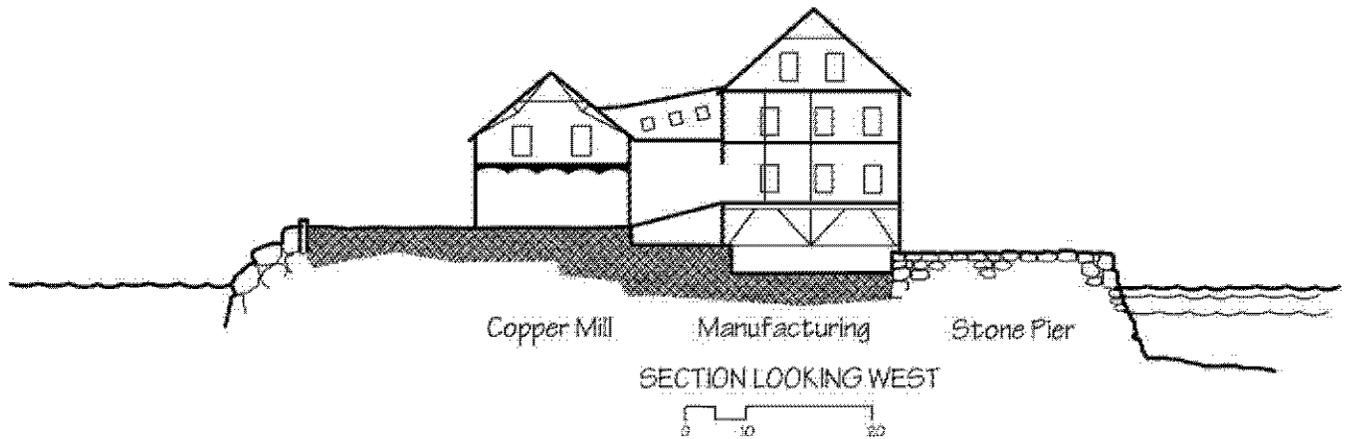


Image 3: Sections. Drawn by Todd Croteau, September 2009, based on drawings in “Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory Adaptive Reuse Study.”

ADDENDUM TO:
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