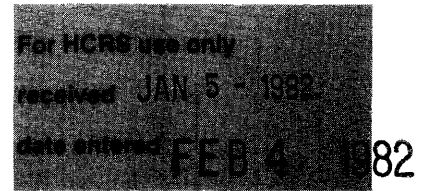


**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



**1. Name**

historic New Castle Ice Piers

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication \_\_\_\_\_

city, town New Castle *Del.*  vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district \_\_\_\_\_

state Delaware code 10 county New Castle code 003

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: navigation

**4. Owner of Property**

name U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

street & number Custom House, Second and Chestnut Streets

city, town Philadelphia \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state PA 19106

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Division of Historical & Cultural Affairs, Bur. of Archaeology & Historic Preservation

street & number Hall of Records

city, town Dover \_\_\_\_\_ state Delaware 19901

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Historic American Engineering Record Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1975  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington \_\_\_\_\_ state District of Columbia

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

This group of seven stone piers, raised to low water on wooden cribs and arranged in an elliptical pattern around a wharf, is located near the west shore of the Delaware River adjacent to the town of New Castle, Delaware. The piers were constructed between the years 1803 and 1882. Each consists of an outer shell of finished granite blocks with an inner core of rubble.

The northernmost of the piers (pier A on the enclosed sketch map), is just off-shore at the foot of Harmony Street. Constructed in 1803, it is rectangular in shape and rises four courses above its wooden crib. Each outer course measures twenty-four to twenty-five inches in height and is composed of stone blocks laid in Flemish bond with a pecked finish. Though they are generally rectangular in shape, the dimensions, except for height, vary considerably from stone to stone. This pier, like those further downstream, has battered walls; it is unique in that its corners are rounded. Top course features include three cylindrical mooring posts arranged in single file along the western side—some 65 inches tall, with domical upper surfaces—and one-inch thick iron strap ties, which replace original one-inch round ties.

Pier B is approximately 225 feet to the east. Erected in 1874, this pier is hexagonal in shape and rises six courses above low water. Its walls of smooth finish ashlar are laid in Flemish bond and are battered. Accessibility is enhanced by two iron ladders set into the masonry surface. Both of these are located on the short walls facing Harmony Street, and are composed of nine round iron bars between thick iron upright plates. Wrought iron ties on the outside stones and two octagonal mooring posts, terminating in eight-facet points and set along the long axis of the pier, complete the finish of the top course. There has been some loss of stone along the eastern side of this pier.

Approximately 225 feet downriver is a hexagonal pier (pier C) constructed in 1879. Laid in Flemish bond rising five courses above a wooden crib, the granite blocks of the outer wall are dressed with a pecked finish surrounded by a smooth margin. This battered pier features two recessed iron ladders; one is on the northwest-facing short side, and the other is on the southeast-facing short side. Finishing the top course are four cylindrical mooring posts with domical tops, and wrought iron ties for the outer stones. Some loss of stone has occurred on western side of this structure, and stones on the downriver point are dislodged.

At the foot of the town wharf and approximately 400 feet directly south is another, almost identical, hexagonal pier (pier D), dating 1882. Similar construction details are: Flemish bond masonry with pecked finish and smooth outer margins, recessed ladders (now missing), and four cylindrical mooring posts with domical upper surface. Contrasting features are the six courses above low water. Some stones are missing or loosened on the downriver point and a concrete patch has been applied.

A fourth hexagonal pier (pier E) is again similar and close in date (1875). Significant features are five stone courses laid in Flemish bond with pecked finish and smooth margins; four cylindrical mooring posts with domical upper surfaces; butterfly headers; and two recessed iron ladders.

(see continuation sheet)

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Navigation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1803-1882 **Builder/Architect**

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Anachronistic in an age of steel-hulled vessels, the New Castle ice breaker piers are relics of a time when violent storms and running ice were constant threats to shipping and navigation on the Delaware River. They are significant to the engineering, navigation, and transportation history of Delaware for being among the earliest and most important harbor improvement projects undertaken on the Delaware River.

When these piers were erected, ships were wooden-hulled and propelled by wind. Prior to the creation of a proper channel, large vessels under sail required certain conditions, including high tidal water, to run up to Philadelphia from the bay. In winter, large running ice floes could sweep off course and even destroy a wooden-hulled vessel. The ice piers, which were essentially small artificial offshore islands, provided a safe harbor for navigation and shipping during violent weather and especially during the harsh winter months. New Castle was not the only harbor of refuge on the Delaware—there are ice piers upriver at Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania—but those at New Castle are the oldest, and are unique in Delaware.

By the late-18th century, traffic on the Delaware was heavy, and New Castle was strategically situated to provide supplies for vessels bound for foreign ports out of Philadelphia. As early as 1786, the idea of a free port at New Castle was advanced, recognizing the town as "healthy, pleasantly situated, having extensive back country, fine harbor, deep water, good anchoring ground and navigable almost all year long". At the same time, piers were seen as an essential harbor improvement.

While plans to establish New Castle as a free port never materialized, those for the creation of an ice harbor did. In 1794, the Legislature passed "An Act to enable the persons therein named to raise a sum not exceeding Twelve Thousand Dollars, by a lottery, for the purpose of erecting piers in the harbor of the town of New Castle." The act allowed for the erection of two or more piers, and appointed John Stockton, William Lees, James Riddle, Kensey Johns, Isaac Grantham, Archibald Alexander, and George Read, Jr. as managers. In its preamble, the Act states that the citizens of New Castle intend to erect piers "for the security of shipping; which will have a beneficial tendency in promoting the commercial and agricultural interests of this State..." Sufficient revenue was realized on September 25, 1795, as indicated in this note in the October 2, 1795, issue of the Philadelphia Daily Advertiser:

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

- George H. Gibson, ed. The Collected Essays of Richard S. Rodney on Early Delaware. Wilmington, 1975.
- Laws of the State of Delaware, Vols. 2 and 3
- Legislative Papers - Hall of Records, Dover, DE

UTM NOT VERIFIED

SCALE NOT VERIFIED

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 9 + acres

Quadrangle name Wilmington South

Quadrangle scale 7.5 minute

### UMT References

A 

1	8
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4	5	1	8	8	0
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4	3	8	9	7	1	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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E 

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H 

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**Verbal boundary description and justification** The boundary of the New Castle Ice Piers nomination is shown as the dotted line on the accompanying map entitled "Sketch Map, N-5930, New Castle Ice Piers, 8/27/81" and drawn at a scale of approximately 200 feet to the inch.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard T. Jett, Preservation Planner

organization New Castle County Department of Planning date 9/18/81

street & number 2701 Capitol Trail telephone 366-7780

city or town Newark state Delaware 19711

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

Deputy/  
State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Richard R. Shifflett*

title Chief, Bureau of Archaeology & Historic Preservation

date 11/24/81

For HCRS use only I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register Entered in the National Register date <u>2/4/82</u>	<i>Richard R. Shifflett</i> Keeper of the National Register Attest: _____ date _____ Chief of Registration
--	---

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only  
received JAN 5 - 1982  
date entered FEB 4 1982

Continuation sheet

Item number 7 Description Page 2 of 2

Immediately north of pier E is pier F, a rectangular pier erected in 1854. The battered walls rise only three courses above a wooden crib, and are laid in Flemish bond with pecked finish. Features of the top course include four octagonal mooring posts with eight-facet pointed tops and keystone-shaped headers. Significant deterioration includes the loss or displacement of stone, particularly on the south and west sides, resulting in the upheaval of all four mooring posts and disruption of the rest of the top course. At low tide, much of the cribbing is exposed, encouraging further deterioration but allowing examination of this supporting network. Revealed are the large, hand-wrought metal spikes used to bind the wooden substructure. Today, this structure forms the western terminus of New Castle's wooden pedestrian pier.

North of the present-day wharf, at the foot of Alexander's Alley, is another battered rectangular pier (pier G), dated 1803 and now at the river's edge due to movement of the channel. Slightly larger than companion 1803 pier A to the north, this pier rises five courses in a running bond above its wooden crib. The top course has been removed and much of the rubble fill, along with some of the stone coping, has been scattered about the site. The result is a cavity filled with vegetation. Nevertheless, elements of the top course, including two cylindrical mooring posts with domical upper surfaces, have survived. Also intact are the outer walls with metal ties binding the top course. Two mooring posts are arranged along the eastern side and a third, octagonal with rounded upper surface, is set in the northeast corner.

The remains of several dismantled or more seriously deteriorated piers, including one which has been incorporated into the modern wharf, are not included in this nomination.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received JAN 5 - 1982

date entered

FEB 4 1982

Continuation sheet

Item number 8 Significance Page 2 of 2

"On Saturday the 26th ult. the Artificers employed in erecting the Piers at New Castle, proceeded, with ANTRIM CONNDROE, the Contractor, and a Committee of the Managers of the Pier Lottery, and sunk the first Pier, fifty feet in length and thirty in breadth, in the depth of water of twenty feet, at low water. Every thing was conducted with the greatest regularity and order, and no misfortune or accident damped their sprirts, or retarded the work. It is intended to complete a Second Pier this season, which will afford a temporary and tolerable secure harbour for vessels in time of ICE."

Neither effort was entirely satisfactory, as within five years Kensey Johns, the Treasurer of the New Castle Pier Lottery, entered into a contract with local builders to repair the pier off Delaware Street, as well as a second pier off Harmony Street.

On December 31, 1801, the managers adopted a resolution providing for repairs to existing piers and the construction of a third pier off Alexander's Alley. This resolution is particularly significant, since the original piers have disappeared with the extension of the wharves, leaving the pier off Alexander's Alley as the only extant pier built as a result of the original lottery.

On April 6, 1802, an Act of Congress appropriated \$30,000 for the erection of piers in the Delaware River, provided the sites were ceded to the federal government. On January 1, 1803, the Delaware Legislature enacted legislation "ceding to the United States of America, the sites of piers, and piers in the river Delaware off the town of New Castle, and jurisdiction in, and over the same." It is known from the 1804 survey map of Benjamin Henry Latrobe that there were four piers in the harbor designated the "U.S. Piers."

The New Castle ice piers, then, appear to be the first federally-supported, non-military improvements undertaken on the Delaware.

In 1827, Major Samuel Babcock supervised the construction of timber piers, joining two of the piers to the wharves and filling up two sluiceways. The result was a harbor filled with mud. By 1835, Major Delafield began construction of two hexagonal piers by razing two of the original rectangular piers to low water and rebuilding them with stone superstructures. This allowed removal of the timber connections. One of Major Delafield's two piers was completed in 1837; the other was never finished.

A plan of the harbor dated 1854 and signed by Major John Sanders, the supervising engineer at Fort Delaware, proposed construction of three additional piers. The plan indicates the pier completed in 1854, upon which the town has since constructed a wooden pedestrian walkway.

Between 1826 and 1838, appropriations for harbor repair and construction of new ice piers were approved almost annually by Congress. Eleven different appropriations after 1852 totaled \$148,000. Construction of the final pier was proposed in 1879. The last appropriation in 1890 provided for dredging and repair of the piers; there would be no further appropriations for the construction of ice piers at New Castle.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

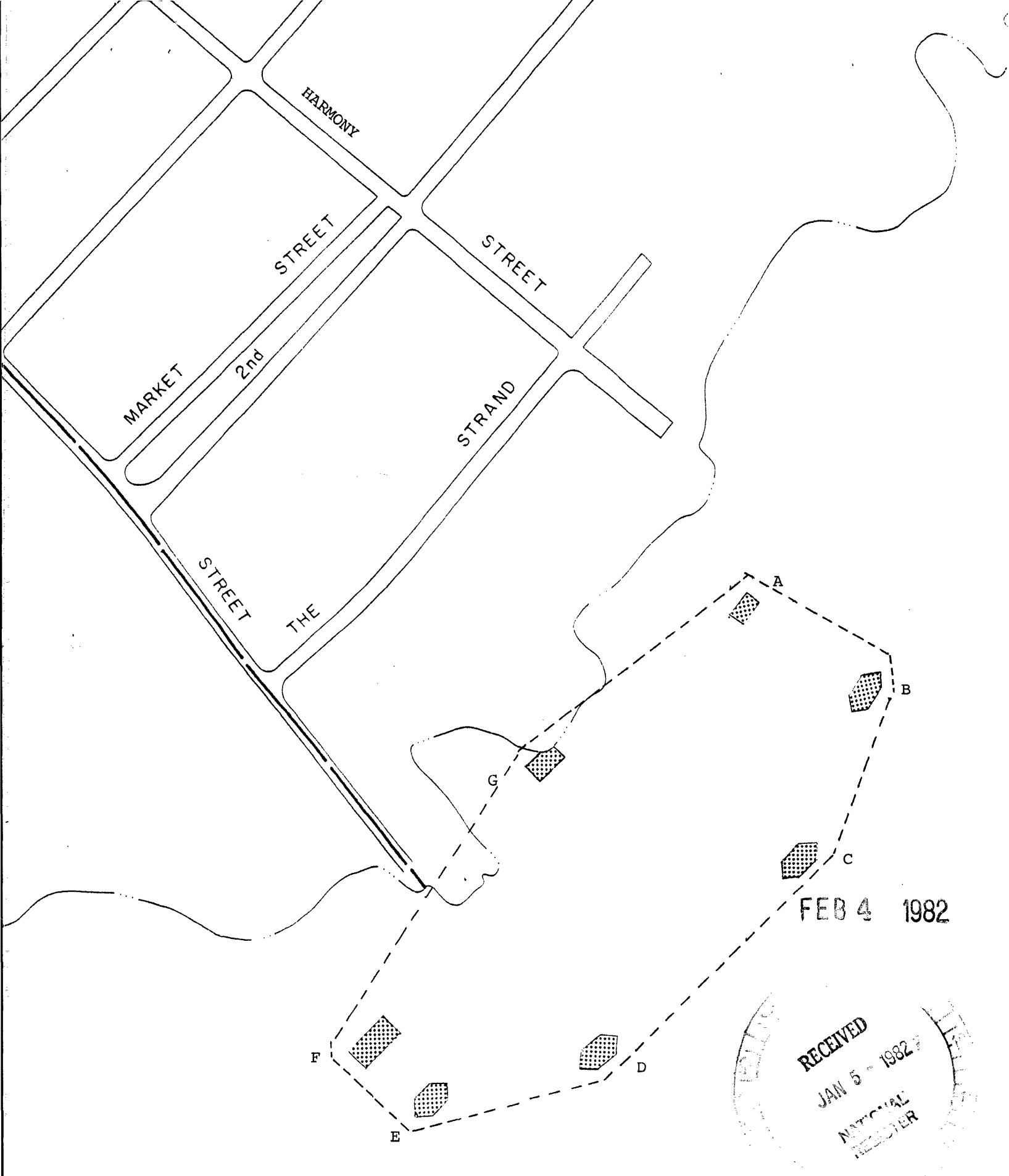
For NPS use only  
received JAN 5 1982  
date entered FEB 4 1982

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 2 of 2

4. George Read II Papers - Richard Rodney Collection - Historical Society of Delaware
5. Frank E. Snyder and Brian H. Guss. The District: A History of Philadelphia District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1866-1971, Philadelphia 1974.



SKETCH MAP	DATE : 8/27/81	▲
N-5930 New Castle Ice Piers	SCALE: 1:200+	
<b>NEW CASTLE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING</b>		



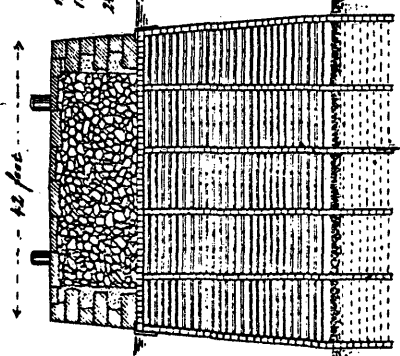
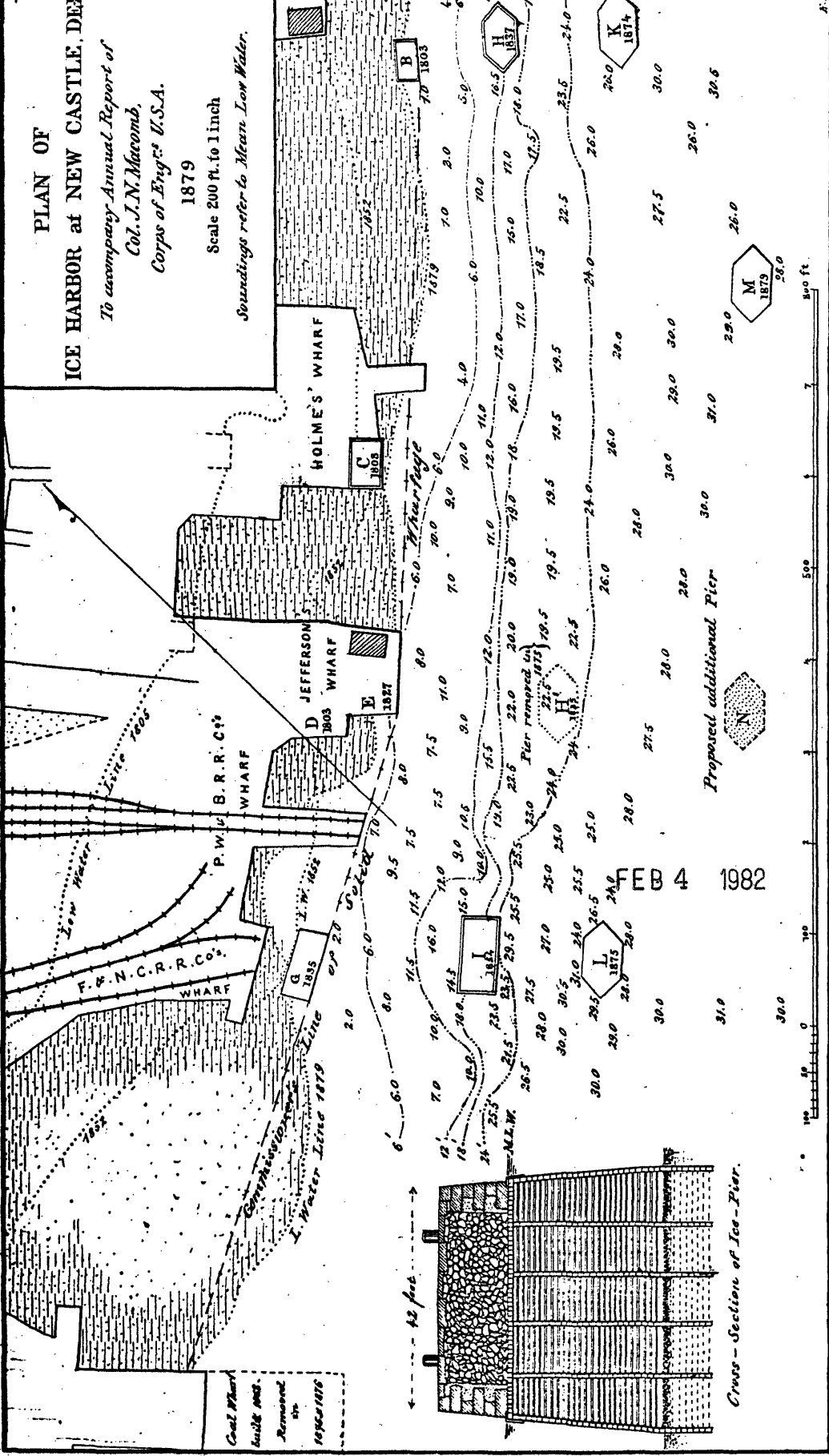
**PLAN OF  
ICE HARBOR at NEW CASTLE, DEL.**

*To accompany Annual Report of  
Col. J.N. Maccomb,  
Corps of Eng'rs U.S.A.*

1879

Scale 200 ft. to 1 inch

*Soundings refer to Mean Low Water.*

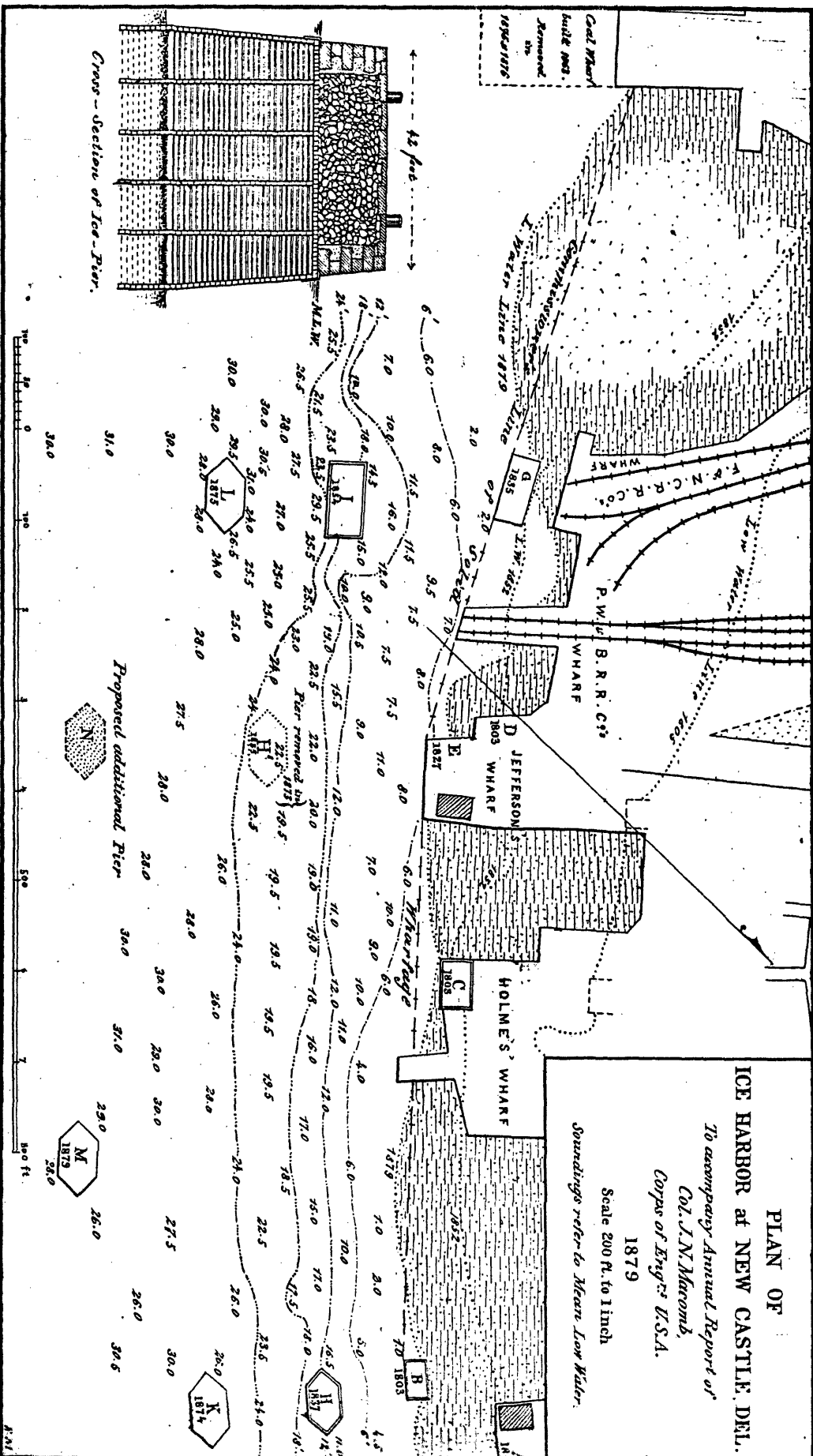


*Cross-Section of Ice-Pier.*

*Reduce this, within border-lines, to 8 X 4 1/2 inches!*

PLAN OF  
ICE HARBOR at NEW CASTLE, DEL.

To accompany Annual Report of  
Col. J.N. Macomb,  
Corps of Eng'rs U.S.A.  
1879  
Scale 200 ft. to 1 inch  
Soundings refer to Mean Low Water.



Reduce this, within border-lines, to 8 X 4 1/2 inches!