



City of East Providence

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EAST PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02914-4505
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OFFICE OF THE
CITY MANAGER

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN

THE CITY OF EAST PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND AND THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION AND HERITAGE COMMISSION REGARDING THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE OCEAN STATE STEEL PROPERTY

WHEREAS the City of East Providence (City) proposes to use Community Development Block Grant funds in its redevelopment of the former Ocean State Steel Company property in East Providence; and

WHEREAS the redevelopment will result in the demolition of several buildings of the Washburn Wire Company/Phillipsdale district, a historic industrial district considered eligible for listing on the National and State Registers of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS the City has been consulting with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, the State Historic Preservation Office (RISHPO), concerning this undertaking's effect on the Washburn Wire Company/Phillipsdale district in accordance with Stipulation 4.B of the Programmatic Agreement governing the City's CDBG program and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f);

NOW, THEREFORE, the City and the RISHPO agree that the redevelopment of the Ocean State Steel Company property shall be carried out in accordance with the following stipulations in order to take into account the effect of the undertaking on historic properties.

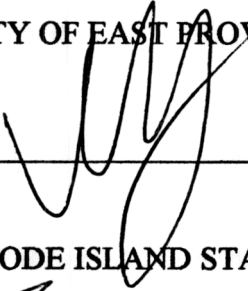
STIPULATIONS

1. The City will prepare documentation of the surviving buildings of the Washburn Wire Company/Phillipsdale district on the Ocean State Steel property for the Rhode Island Historic Resource Archive prior to any demolition. The documentation will include archival quality photographs of the structures as well as the archival preservation of any relevant architectural and engineering plans.
2. The City will provide the RISHPO the opportunity to review and approve the redevelopment plans prior to implementation to insure any impacts on the surviving components of the Washburn Wire Company/Phillipsdale district.

3. Any party to this Agreement may request that it be amended, whereupon the parties will consult in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800 to consider such an amendment.

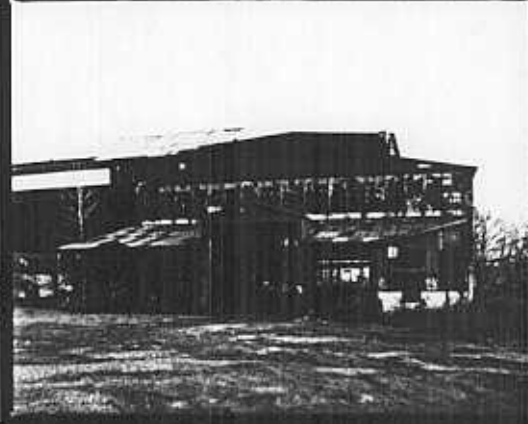
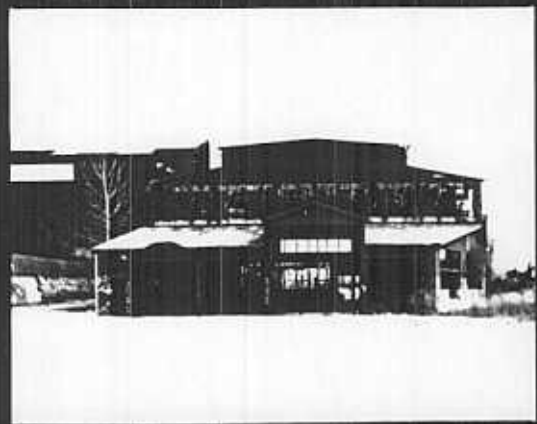
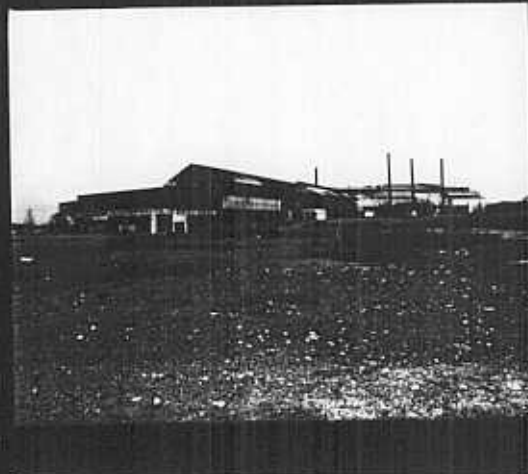
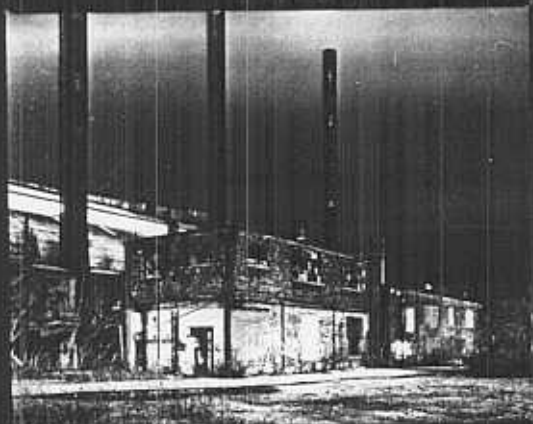
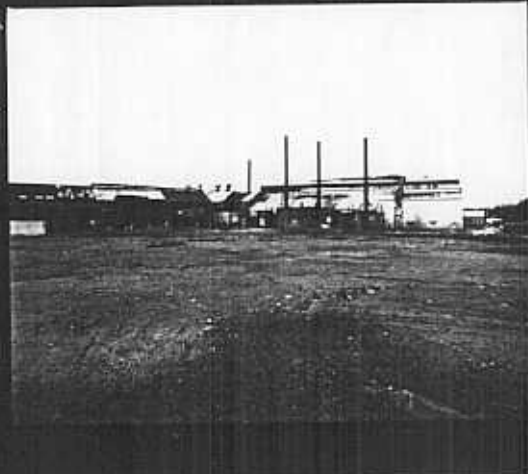
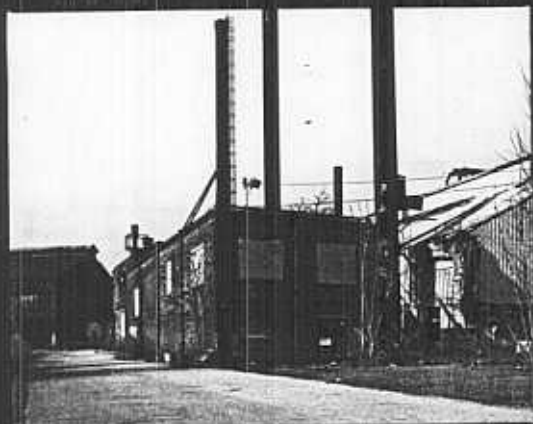
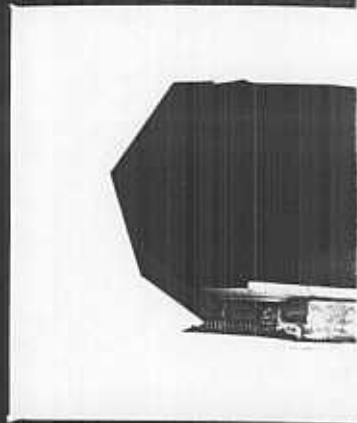
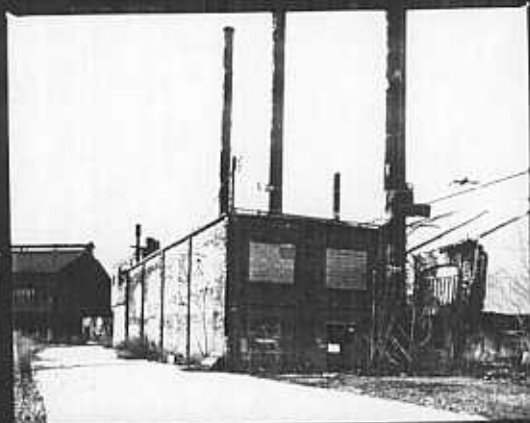
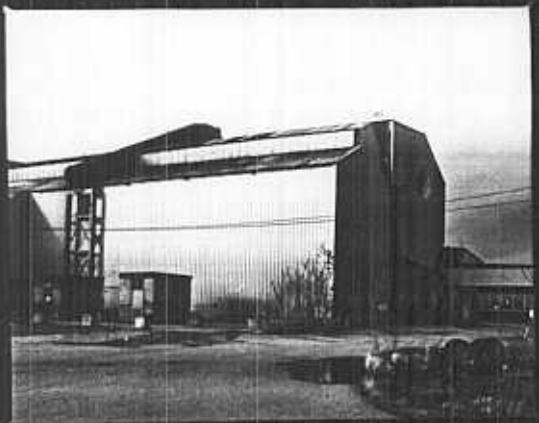
EXECUTION of this Agreement and implementation of its items evidence that the City of East Providence has taken into account the effects of the redevelopment of the Ocean State Steel Company property on historic properties.

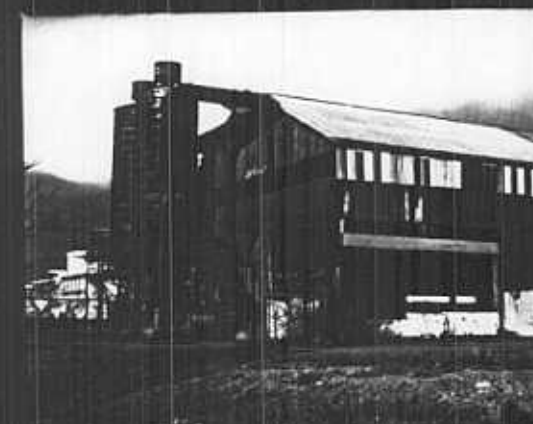
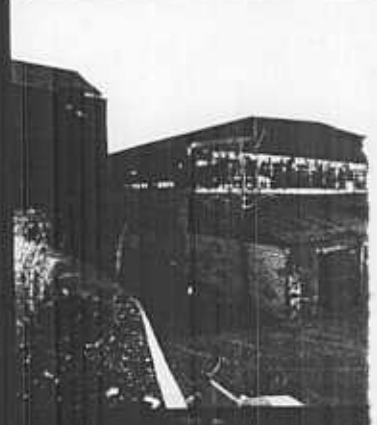
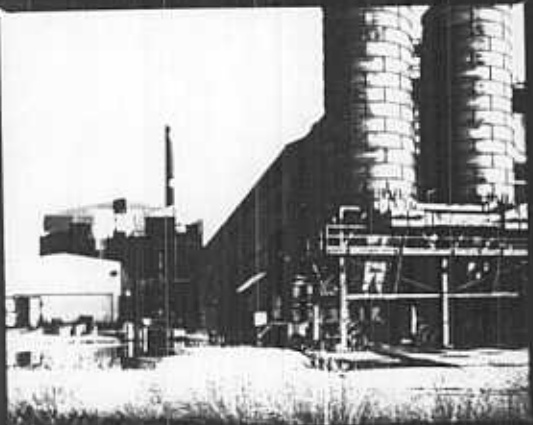
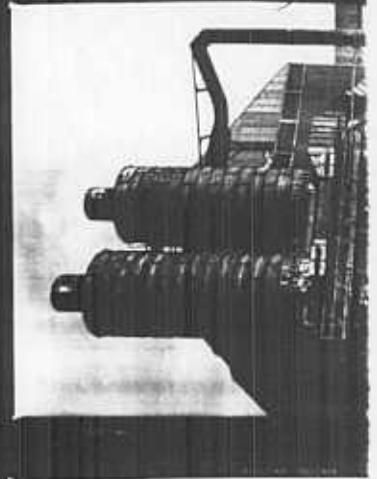
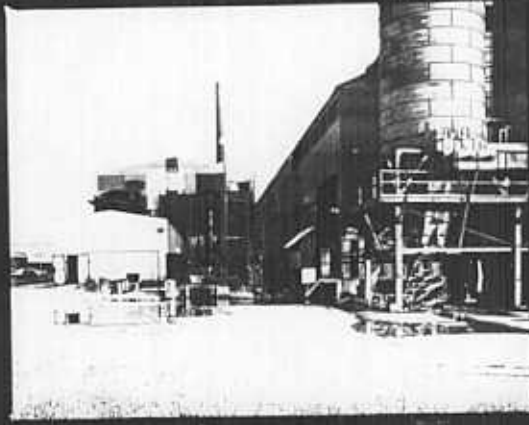
THE CITY OF EAST PROVIDENCE

By:  Date: 12/4/03

THE RHODE ISLAND STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER

By:  Date: 12/8/2003

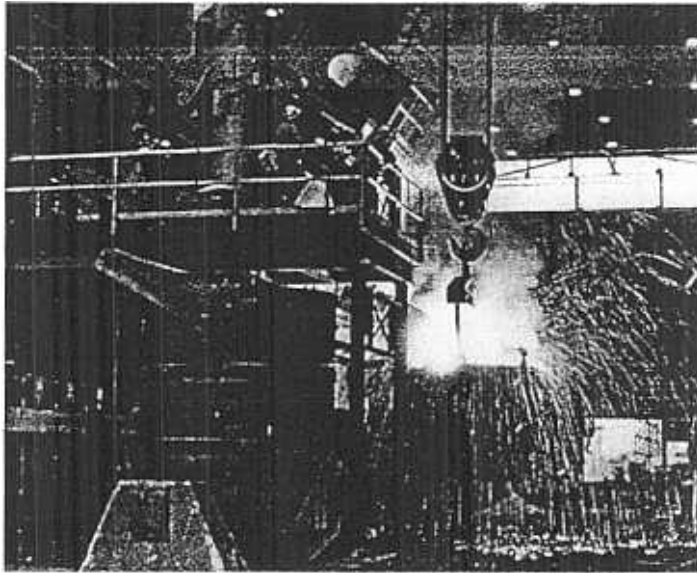




**Washburn Wire Company
& Ocean State Steel**

East Providence, Rhode Island

RIHRA EAPR-0002



Washburn Wire, circa 1975

**Photo-Documentation Project for the
City of East Providence**

Edward Connors and Aaron Usher
December 2003

Project Information

In November 2003 the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission determined that the Washburn Wire Company complex in East Providence was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The remaining buildings are slated for demolition as part of the redevelopment project known as East Pointe. Although much demolition was carried out during the occupation of Ocean State Steel (1982-1994), the five remaining substantial buildings at the site contribute to the historical significance of the complex. This photo-documentation project has been undertaken to mitigate the loss of these buildings.

The Physical Evolution of the Washburn Wire/Ocean State Steel Complex

Within a few years of the laying of the East Providence branch of the Providence and Worcester Railroad along the Seekonk River in 1874, industrial entrepreneurs began a rapid transformation of this waterfront parcel of the "Seekonk Plains" land purchased by George Wilson for his Rumford Chemical Works in 1858. Wilson sited his main manufacturing plant in East Providence Center (Rumford) and his "Riverside" Chemical Works and farm along the east bank of the Seekonk River (Figure 1).¹

In 1882 Wilson sold off a parcel south of his Riverside Works to Providence paper merchant Franklin H. Richmond. This purchase included the right to create a dam on the Ten Mile River at Seekonk Cove. This impoundment, completed around 1883, created Paper Mill Pond, later renamed Omega Pond. Richmond operated the Richmond Paper Company from 1882 until its bankruptcy in 1887. The plant lay vacant until it was purchased at public auction by insulated wire innovator Eugene F. Phillips in 1893. Although 1893 also saw the onset of a deep economic depression, Phillips' American Electrical Works (AEW) thrived and expanded in the former paper mill complex due to the burgeoning telegraph, telephone, and trolley wire markets. Shortly after the conversion of the paper mill to wire manufacture, the surrounding village was renamed Phillipsdale.

In 1899 Frank Sayles purchased another waterfront parcel north of AEW for his Sayles Bleachery and Glenlyon Dye Works plants. A June 1900 item in the *Board of Trade Journal* describes the purchase of a 14-acre parcel south of AEW and originally intended for a venture associated with a Franks Sayles-related company, Agawam Finishing. The item described Sayles' intention to erect a building for textile finishing.² Apparently, this venture was abandoned because soon after, the parcel was resold to a new corporation, the Washburn Wire Company. Charles G. Washburn and Eugene Phillips were partners in this new venture.³

During the summer of 1900, Washburn Wire built a brick and steel open hearth furnace building (No. 17) and an attached blooming mill (No. 89). In operation by 1901, its daily output was some 80 gross tons of steel ingot. By 1903 Washburn leased the "hand caught" rod mill of the John Wales Wire Co. in the Auburn section of Cranston, RI. This

plant was purchased outright in 1906, its machinery moved to Phillipsdale in 1908. Washburn housed these new operations as well as a new Boiler and Engine House in Bldgs. 45-49.

The only construction in the period from 1917 to 1921 was the Patenting Building (No. 66). By the late 1920s the company had installed a steam turbine driving a 3500 KW dynamo (probably in Bldg. 46) and a second open hearth furnace in an eastward expansion of the original Open Hearth building (No. 17).

Late 1920s through Depression-era expansion at Washburn included expansion of the original rod mill (Bldg. No. 72), a brick Blooming Mill extension (Bldg. 89A), construction of a Storage Building (Bldg. 92), and the No. 2 Rod Mill.

A Machine Shop (Bldg. No. 112) was built between 1939 and 1951. The last significant construction at the site was the 1968 erection of a steel frame Melt Room to house two electric arc furnaces. Sometime after 1968 a building was erected behind the Melt Room to house Washburn's continuous casting operations. Figure 2 shows Washburn Wire Co. at the peak of its operation in the 1950s. A comparison of aerial photographs from 1939 to 1951 shows several acres of land reclaimed from the Seekonk River at the southwest corner of the site. What appears in 1939 to be a triangular shaped breakwater below Bldg. No. 66 is completely filled-- likely with slag--by 1951.

Within a year of the resolution of an eight-month strike (September 1974 to May 1975), Washburn Wire filed for bankruptcy. The company closed in 1982. Shortly after, Ocean State Steel, an American subsidiary of a Swiss company, purchased the complex and continued to produce steel until 1994. During their occupation, Ocean State carried out extensive demolition of much of the construction dating to 1908-1939. The site has been vacant since that time.

**Table 1. Washburn Wire/Ocean Steel
Building Inventory**

BLDG NO./NAME	DATE	DIMENSIONS	DEMOLITION
7 Open Hearth Bldg	1900	240 x 80	
18 Blooming Mill*	1900	320 x 80	
34 Gas Producer Bldg.	before 1917	68 x 26	
35 Locomotive Hse.**	before 1917	55 x 30	
36 Lime Shed	1917-1921	36 x 30	1928-1939
45 1 st Rod Mill	1908	180 x 115	1992-1995
46 Power House	1908	180 x 50	1992-1995
47 Boiler Hse	1908	100 x 50	1992-1995
48 Annealing Rm.	1908	90 x 85	1992-1995
49 Wire mill	1908	164 x 70	1992-1995
66 Patenting Bldg	1917-1921	170 x 55	1992-1995
72 2 nd Rod Mill	1921-1928	150 x 129	1992-1995
89A Blooming Mill ext	1928-1939	160 x 40	
92 Storage Bldg.	1928-1939	360 x 70	
No 2 Rod Mill	1928-1939	195 x 60	1992-1995
72A Exp. of No. 2 Rod Mill	1928-1939	135 x 135	1992-1995
112 Mach Shop	1939-1951	120 x 75	
Melt Room***	1968	100 x 300	
Continuous Casting Bldg.	after 1968	185 x 60	

* Also labeled Bldg. No. 89. Enlarged, possibly replaced by Ocean State Steel ca 1990

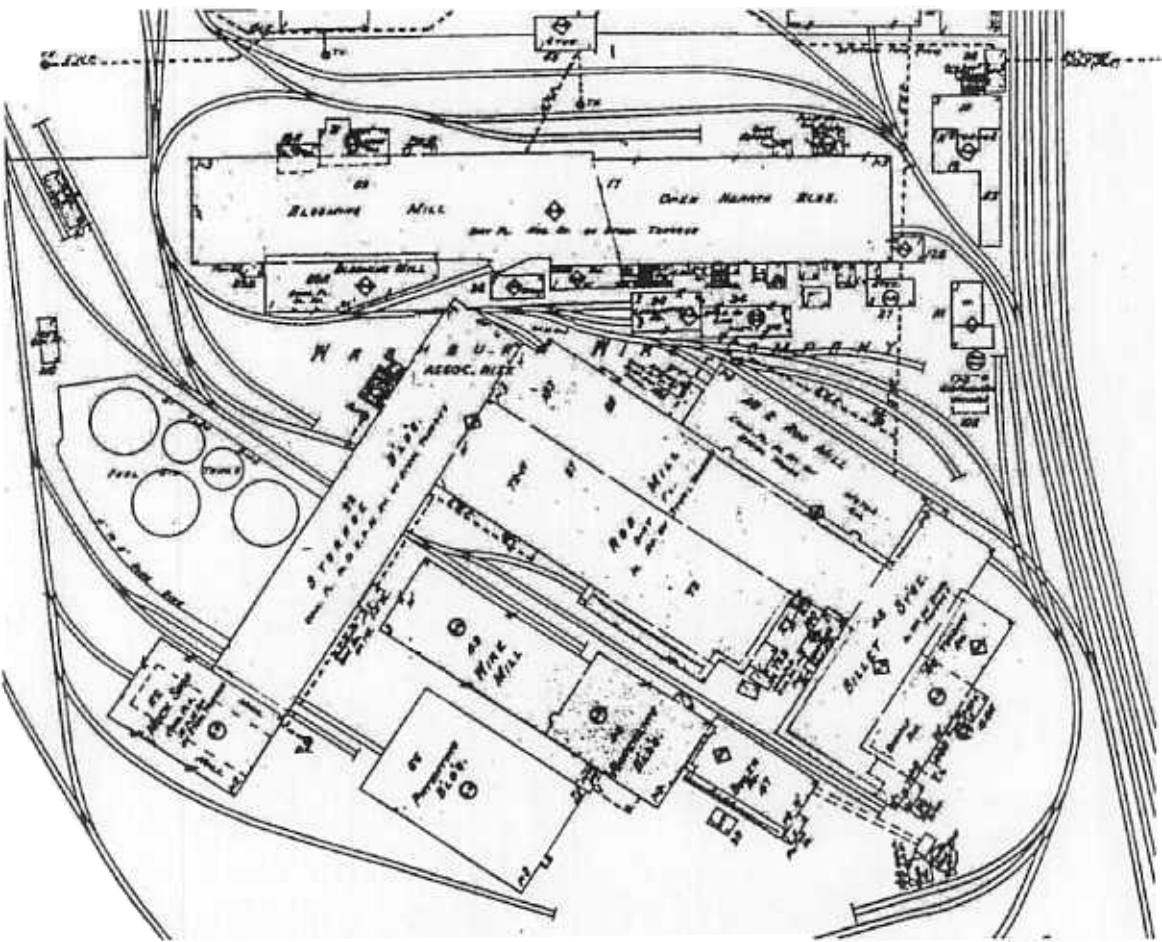
**Converted to other uses, second floor served as locker room

***Anecdotal evidence suggests that this building was once part of a Ford Plant, disassembled, and moved to Phillipsdale.

Figure 1. Detail of Seekonk Cove (later, Omega Pond) and Riverside Chemical Works from 1870 Beers Atlas



Figure 2. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1951



Selected Bibliography and Sources of Information

“American Electrical Works—The Washburn Wire Company.” *Board of Trade Journal* (November 1904): 488

Eddy, Nils. “Steelmaking at Phillipsdale.” 1990, unpublished Brown University research paper. On file, RIHPHC and East Providence Department of Planning and Community Development

Hulick, Doane. “Takes a mill to raise a village.” *Providence Journal* (19 March 1998)

Obituary of Eugene F. Phillips. “American Electrical Works—Washburn Wire Company.” *Board of Trade Journal* (March 1905): 126-7

“Phillipsdale: Growth of American Electrical Works, with plant there located.” *Board of Trade Journal* (17 June 1897): 58 et seq.

RI State Bureau of Information. *The Book of Rhode Island*. 1930

RI Statewide Planning. Aerial photography, 1939 and 1951. Also available at <http://www.edc.uri.edu/rigis-spf/statewide/state.html#raster>

Richards, L.J. Atlas of the Providence Metropolitan District (Vol. 2). 1917

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (1921, 1928, 1951)

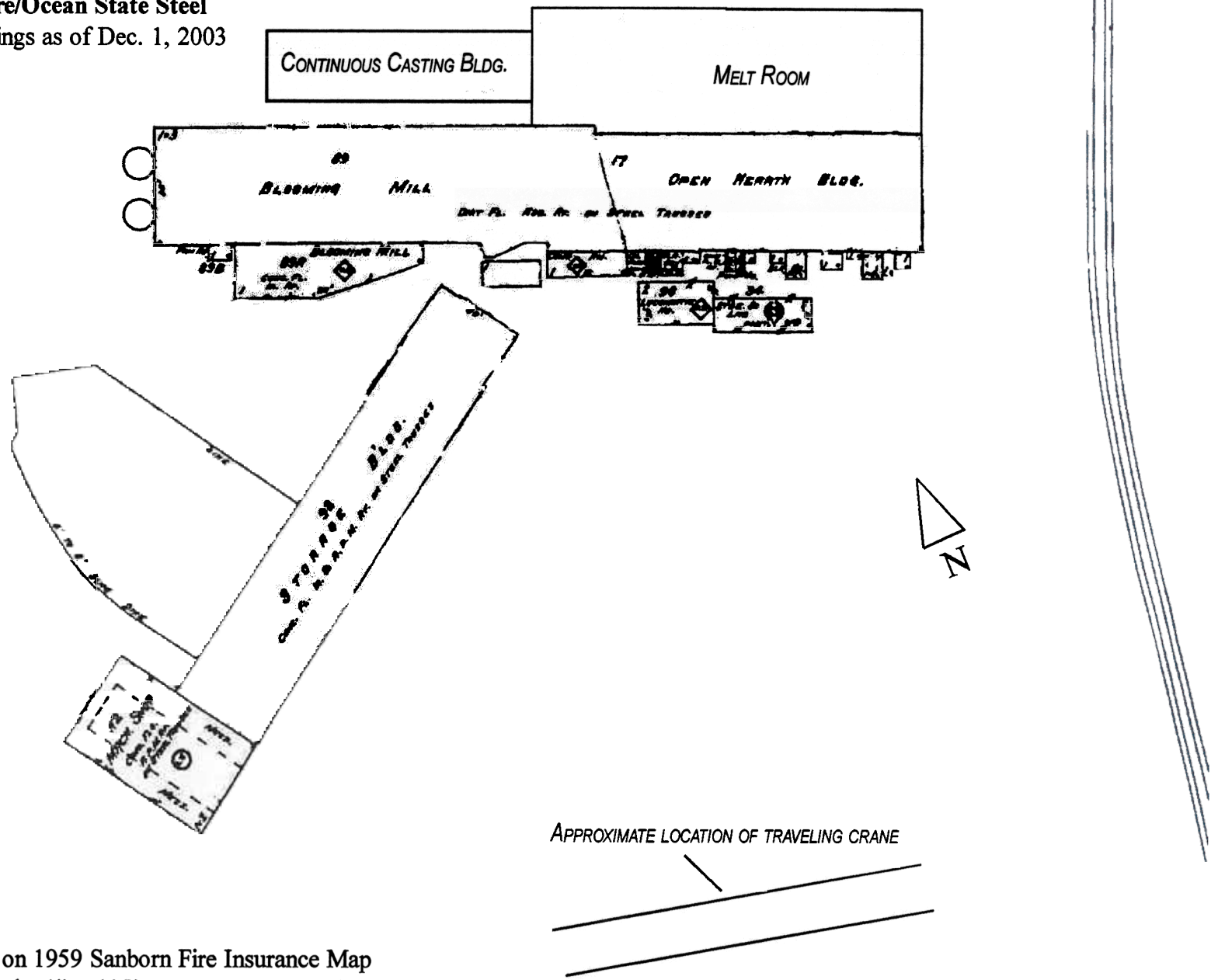
Washburn Wire Co. *High Quality Products from Washburn Specialty Steels* (undated advertising brochure, ca 1975)

¹ For a detailed description of Wilson's operation at both locations, see Horace Greeley (ed.), *The Great Industries of the United States*. Greeley's essay on the state of the American chemical industry in the 1870s (pp 1104-1115) is a discussion solely of Wilson's Rumford and Riverside Chemical Works.

² This item describes Sayles' erection of a building at the site. It appears to be incorrect as the first deep, single-story, dirt-floored open hearth building at the site bears no resemblance to typical textile finishing buildings of the period. See *Board of Trade Journal* (June 1900): 263

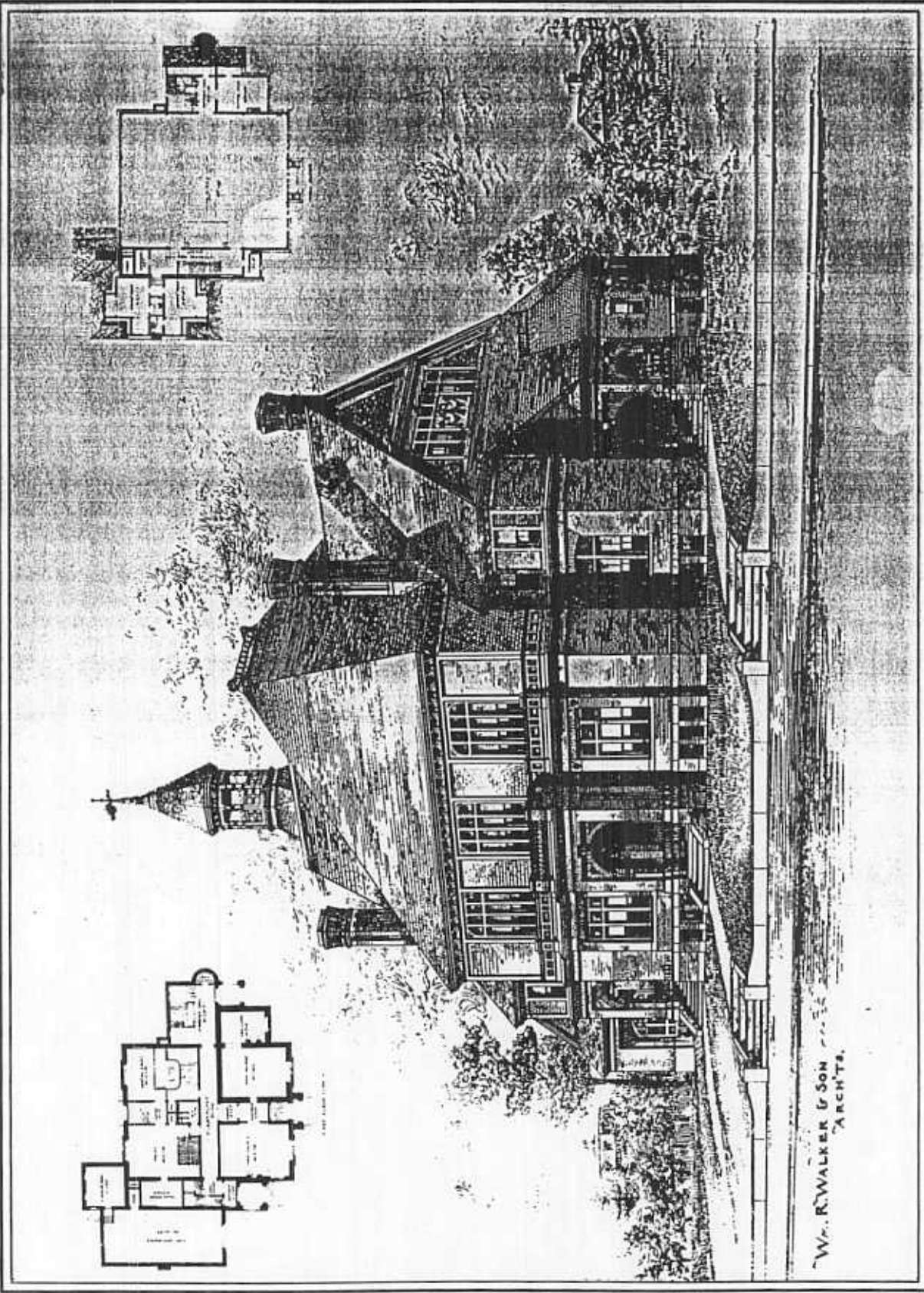
³ Washburn was the son of Charles F. Washburn of Washburn and Moen, barbed wire manufacturers of Worcester, Massachusetts. After the acquisition of this company by American Steel and Wire, Charles Washburn set off on his own. Although he left the East Providence operation in 1903, the company carried his name until it closed in 1982.

Figure 3. Current conditions
Washburn Wire/Ocean State Steel
Surviving buildings as of Dec. 1, 2003



Drawing based on 1959 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map
Approximate scale: 1" = 115'

2
1898



EAST PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Industrial Development

At the same time as residential development was beginning to take hold in Watchemoket, the open lands to the north began to be used for manufacturing purposes. Small-scale operations on the Ten Mile River had long been in existence, with grist and saw mills dating back to the seventeenth century. In the early 1800s, cotton mills were erected at the head of Seekonk Cove (Omega, later Clyde Mills, ca. 1801) and at Hunts Mills (ca. 1823). These were soon joined by another cotton mill at the south end of Central Pond. The Omega Mill, which stood until 1974, was a simple stone building, in configuration not appreciably different from the workers' housing built around it (Figure 38). The Ten Mile River, however, did not generate sufficient power to support major textile plants like those constructed in other parts of the state by the 1830s. Nor was water power available along the Seekonk River below the falls at Pawtucket. On the other hand, the abundance of open and relatively inexpensive land as well as its proximity to both Providence and Pawtucket did make the northern portion of East Providence a potential site for industries which did not need large supplies of adjacent running water for their manufacturing processes. In 1857, this opportunity was seized by George F. Wilson, owner of the Rumford Chemical Works. Moving his plant from Providence, he located on land which had been part of the Ring. This was the first major development on the former common, but, visually, the change was not as great as might be expected. In contrast to the large masonry buildings erected to house textile plants in that period, the various operations of Wilson's enterprise were contained in separate barn-like wood-frame structures (Figure 39). The appearance of these early buildings was inevitably the result of practical, not esthetic determinants; nevertheless, the result provided a complementary element to the rural landscape in which the works were set.

Pastoral isolation was probably not what Wilson wanted. Once the main plant was established, he began purchasing the older industrial sites: Central Mills in 1873, Hunt's Mills in 1877, and Omega Mills ca. 1878. Subsidiary operations were started at the latter site, and a small steel works was begun on on Grinnell Point along the Seekonk. By the late 1870s, the Rumford Chemical Works owned most of the property fronting the Ten Mile River and along the Seekonk River north of Omega Pond. The concern also held some 800 acres of farmland, where a variety of agricultural products were raised primarily for sale to company employees. Wilson's long-range plans for his holdings are not known; however, some clue of his intentions is given by the fierce, but unsuccessful, cam-

paign he led to have the needed replacement for the Red Bridge realigned so as to feed directly into his domain. He may well have been hoping to sell much of his land for large-scale industrial, commercial, or residential development. Wilson's plant, itself, flourished; and by the late nineteenth century, large masonry buildings began to replace the earlier structures (Figure 40). Still, the Rumford Chemical Works remained a factory in the country. The company erected few workers' houses; many of the employees were highly skilled and sufficiently well-off to build their own dwellings near the plant or in Watchemoket. In 1897, a large piece of the company's property was sold to the Agawam Hunt Club as a golf course. Shortly thereafter, Wilson's own house was converted into the Wampanoisset Country Club. Additional parcels were gradually platted for subdivision. Only within the last thirty years have other manufacturers located near the plant; but, by this time, the land around them was well developed as a suburban community.

Although inland property remained semi-rural, Wilson did induce several small-scale industries to locate along the Seekonk River north of Omega Pond, beginning in the 1870s. The most significant development here occurred in 1893 when a wealthy Providence manufacturer of insulated wire, Eugene Phillips, relocated his plant

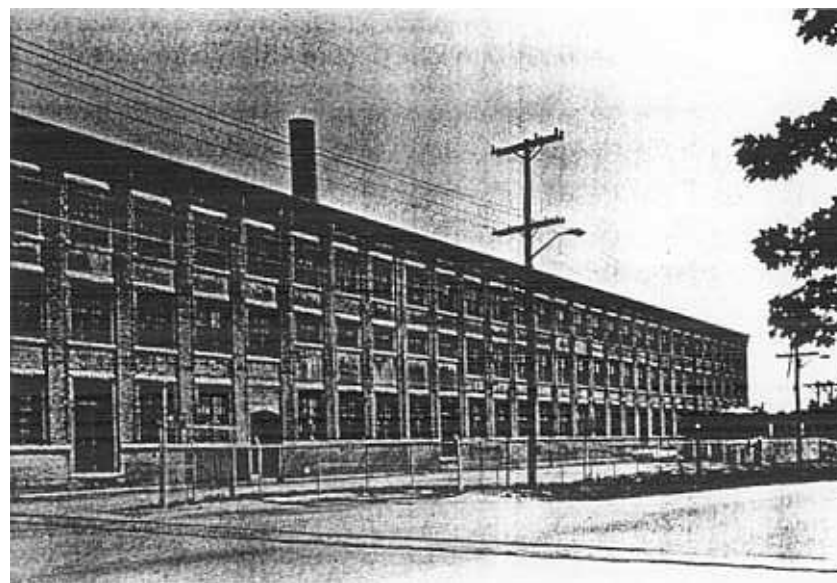


Fig. 40: Rumford Chemical Works, monocalcium phosphate plant (ca. 1890, ca. 1895).

to Grinnell Point (Figure 41). Eight years later, the Washburn Wire Company merged with Phillips' American Electrical Works, and subsequently a steel mill was erected next to the existing plant. Shortly before, the Sayles Corporation purchased the land to the north for the Glenlyon Bleachery. The scale of this industrial compound far exceeded any of its predecessors in East Providence. The Washburn Wire Company alone was the largest single employer and among the largest taxpayers in the town. Many of its workers commuted from Providence and Pawtucket as well as Watchemoket, a trip facilitated by the extension of a trolley line along Roger Williams Avenue in the late 1890s. About the same time, both Washburn Wire and Glenlyon began an energetic campaign to erect company housing close by. Some of the first units were probably moved to their present locations in order to accommodate immediate needs. Many others were built on the premises, and, by 1910, a new community, named Phillipsdale, had emerged (Figure 42). In its configuration, this settlement is a late version of numerous low-density mill villages built in New England during the nineteenth century. Rows of houses, surrounded by yards, form a regularized version of many small towns. Early villages of this type were generally built because their factories were isolated from existing communities. By the latter decades of the nineteenth century, however, such housing often stemmed from a paternalistic desire to provide decent quarters for employees. A number of the houses in Phillipsdale were patterned after those in model English working-class towns such as Bournville and Port Sunlight (Figure 43). There were dis-

advantages: when a worker lost his job, he also lost his house. On the other hand, living conditions in company dwellings could be appreciably better than comparable quarters elsewhere. Long since transferred to individual ownership, the houses in Phillipsdale still form a desirable segment of East Providence's residential fabric.

Related development occurred at Hunts Mills during this period. A pumping station was erected there in 1893, primarily to serve the Rumford Chemical Works and the new Phillipsdale factories (Figure 44). Subsequently, the Sayles Corporation assumed control of the facility, adding a picnic ground and small amusement park to the complex. The Ten Mile River's scenic qualities were also preserved. The area became a favorite place for weekend excursionists from Providence, and a cluster of canoe houses and refreshment stands were erected on the river near Omega Pond (Figure 45). Rather than inhibiting these recreational activities, the nearby factories helped foster them, not only with the development on Hunt's Mills, but by retaining much of the land along both the river and pond. Industrial expansion was sufficiently limited and sufficiently close to other areas so as not to incur the intense residential and commercial building patterns experienced in cities such as Pawtucket and Woonsocket. Although the amusement park and canoe clubs have long since disappeared, industrial and low-density residential land uses continue to co-exist in the area, which could again become one of the city's finest scenic and recreational assets.

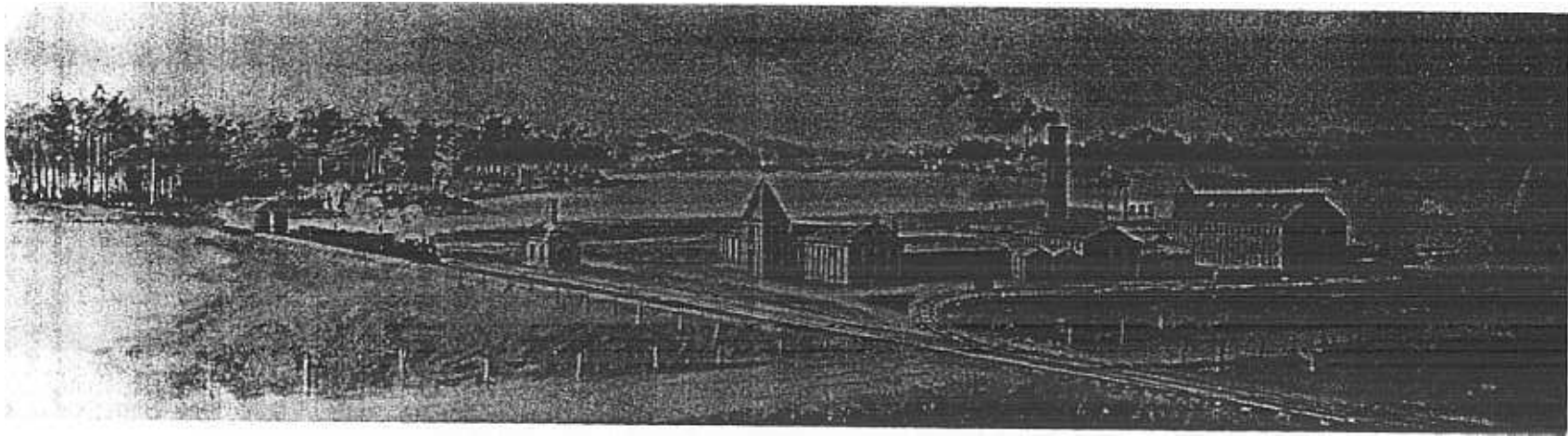


Fig. 41: American Electrical Works (Washburn Wire Co.) (1893), 293 Bourne Avenue.



Fig. 42: Phillipsdale from Washburn Wire Company, photo ca. 1900.



Fig. 43: Double houses for the Sayles Corp. (ca. 1910), probably Hilton and Jackson, archs., 242-252 Roger Williams Avenue.

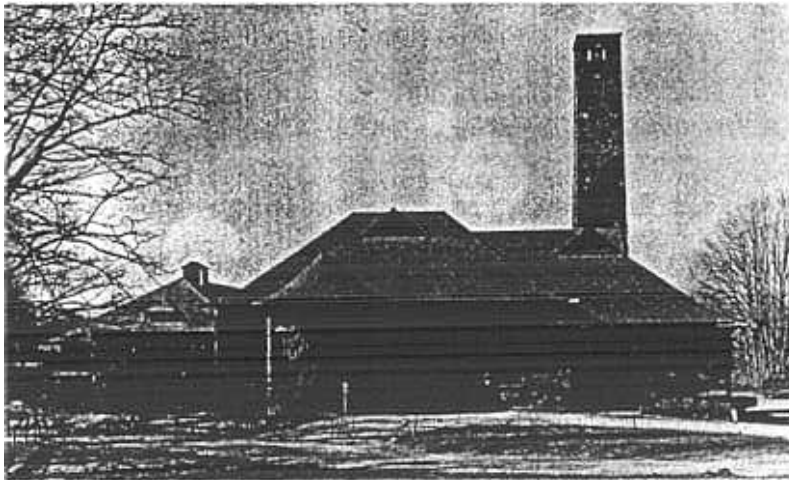


Fig. 44: Pumping Station (1893), Hunts Mills Road.



Fig. 45: "Canoe carnival," Omega Pond, ca. 1900s.

65 **BLUFF STREET**
House: between 1882-1895, 1½-story Victorian dwelling with cross-gable roof; simple gingerbread details on front porch, patterned shingles at upper level; built as a summer cottage, a good surviving example of the type once common in Riverside.
House: between 1882-1895, 1½-story Victorian dwelling with cross-gable roof; built as a summer cottage.

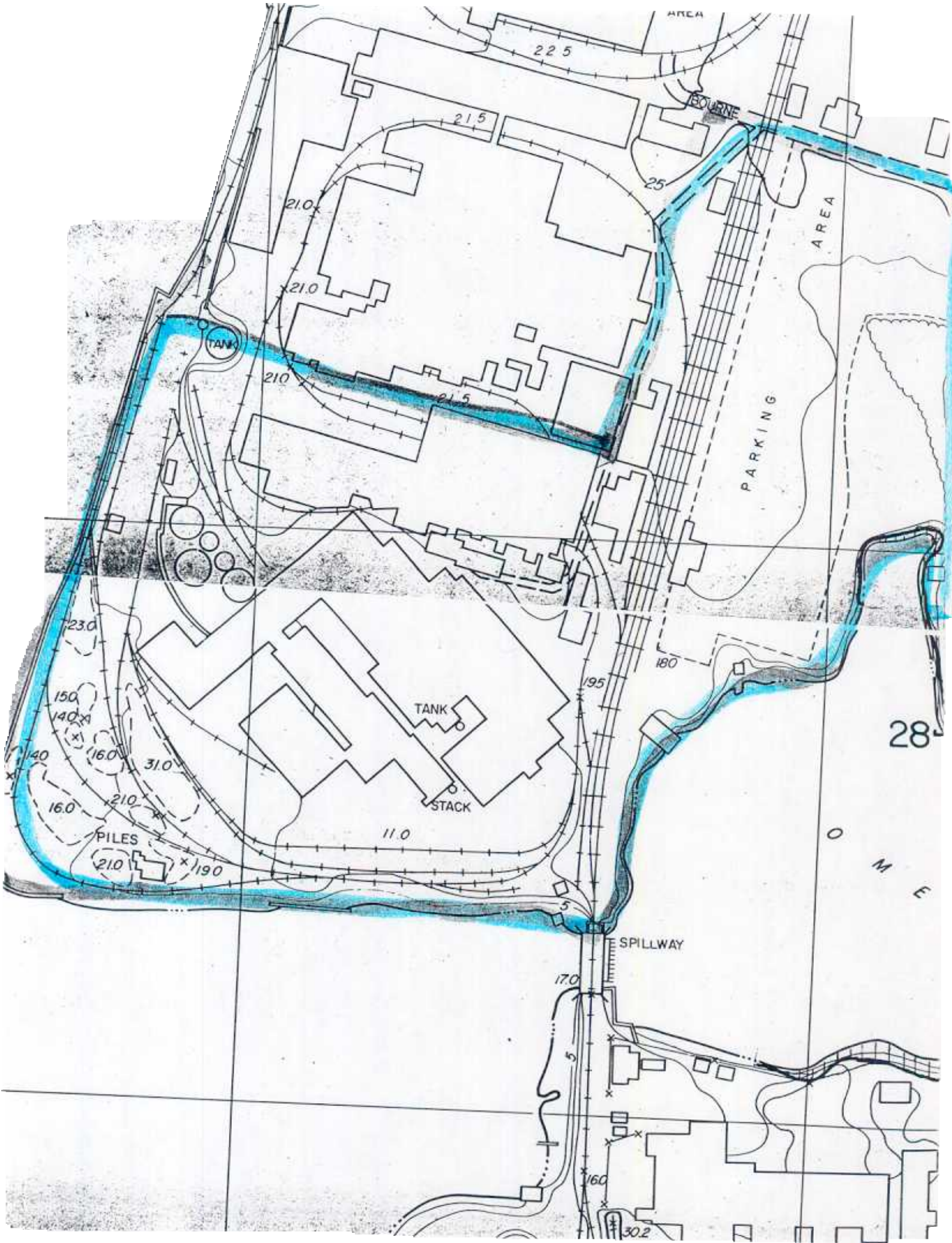
293* **BOURNE AVENUE**
Washburn Wire Company: 1893 et seq. A large industrial complex with most of its buildings erected during one or more of the following periods: 1893, 1900-1902, 1926-1928, and 1930-1936. Notable structures include the 2-story brick building with large front tower which housed much of the original plant, 1893, the 3-story brick open hearth furnace, 1900, (both facing the railroad tracks), and the brick and glass curtain wall cable mill, 1928, (facing Bourne Ave.). Complex also includes unusual survivals of early 20th-century steel manufacturing equipment, especially the hand-caught rod mill, 1926. Land purchased 1893 by Eugene Phillips for the American Electrical Works (est. 1870) to manufacture insulation for copper wire. Steel plant erected on adjacent property in 1900 by the Washburn Wire Company. The two organizations merged in 1902, using the latter's name and with Phillips as president. Washburn Wire was the largest industry and the largest single employer in the city during much of the 20th century. Wire manufacturing facilities purchased by the Kennecott Wire Cable Company ca. 1935, and in turn became part of the Okonite Company in the 1950s.

ALICE STREET
First Universalist Church: 1882, moderate size Victorian building with rectangular plan, end-gable roof and side tower; a good local example of the Stick Style. Lower portions badly marred by 1960s remodeling — a poor example of adaptive use. Now serves as an office building.

BALCOM STREET
House: after 1882, 1½-story Victorian dwelling with cross-gable roof and three-sided porch. A good example of many cottages in Riverside and among the least altered.

BERWICK PLACE
Edward Lovring house: ca. 1937, Peter Geddes, architect; 1½-story dwelling with gambrel and gable roofs. A good example of academic Colonial Revival work, prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s.

BISHOP AVENUE
Bishop-Leonard house: probably early 19th century, extensive alterations ca. 1938, Lester Leonard, designer; 2-story, 6-bay dwelling with a gable roof. Built as a double house, probably by John Bishop. Transformed to present state by Leonard for his own residence incorporating some fragments collected from 18th-century New England buildings, but mostly using elements fashioned after 18th-century models. A good example of the archeological approach to Colonial Revival design characteristic of the 1920s and 1930s. Leonard was an antiques dealer with an interest, but no professional experience in architecture. Building owned by Rumford Chemical Works and used for employees housing 1866-1935.



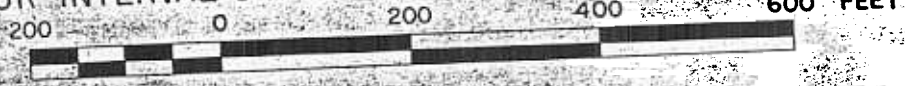


NOTE:
 MAP UPDATED USING PHOTOGRAPHY
 TAKEN APRIL 7, 1973.

1000 FOOT GRID BASED ON RHODE ISLAND RECTANGULAR
 GRID SYSTEM 1927 N.A. DATUM
 VERTICAL CONTROL BASED ON CITY DATUM - MEAN HIGH WATER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET

NOVEMBER 1963



CITY OF EAST PROVIDENCE
 DIVISION OF PLANNING
 WETLANDS MAPS
 DISC LAND