



Government of the District of Columbia
Historic Preservation Review Board



Application for Historic Landmark or Historic District Designation

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name: SEAFARERS YACHT CLUB

Address: 1950 M STREET SE

Square Number: 1080E

Lot Number: 0803

Date of Construction: 1964

Date of Major Alteration(s):

Architect(s): CHARLES "BOB" MARTIN

Architectural Style(s): NO STYLE

Original Use: CLUBHOUSE

Present Use: CLUBHOUSE

Property Owner: GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Legal Address of Property Owner: 1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW

DESIGNATION INFORMATION

☒ Historic Landmark ☐ Historic District

☒ New Designation ☐ Amendment of a Previous Designation ☐ Interior Designation

Proposed Criteria: ☐ A. Events ☒ B. History ☐ C. Persons ☐ D. Architecture and Urbanism

☐ E. Artistry ☐ F. Creative Master ☐ G. Archaeology

Please add any clarifying information describing what is proposed for designation:

Seafarers Yacht Club was founded in 1945. The main building dates to 1964, although there are other structures on site which date from the 1940s.

If any part of the interior is being nominated, it must be specifically identified and described in the narrative statements.

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Applicant(s) Name: Seafarers Yacht Club (Commodore Tony Ford) and D.C. Historic Preservation Office


Address: c/o Roger Legerwood 2007 Keating St. Temple Hills, MD 20748

Phone Number: 301-580-1670

Email: rlegerwood@yahoo.com

Authorized Representative Name: Roger Legerwood

Title: Treasurer/Historian

Signature of Representative: 

Date: 10/13/21

Author of Application: Anne Brockett

Phone Number: 202-442-8842

Note: If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.

Case number: _____

Date received: _____

H.P.O. staff: _____

Date filed: _____

Affected ANC(s): _____

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Seafarers Yacht Club

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: 1950 M Street SECity or town: Washington State: DC County: _____Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☒
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

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Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)	X
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District

Site	
------	--

Structure

Object	
--------	--

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing
2

Noncontributing
1

buildings

sites

2

structures

objects

4

4

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/Clubhouse

RECREATION/CULTURE/Outdoor Recreation

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Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/Clubhouse_____

RECREATION/CULTURE/Outdoor Recreation_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete block, asphalt

Narrative Description

The Seafarers Yacht Club occupies .59-acre lot at the northernmost end of M Street SE in Washington DC. The property consists of two contributing buildings (clubhouse and wheelhouse), three contributing structures (railway, ramp, and Anacostia Seawall) as well as the non-contributing docks, shed, and flagpole. These features are clustered around a central gathering space with a seasonal tent, shade trees, and picnic tables.

Site

The Seafarers Yacht Club is located at 1950 M Street SE, in Washington DC. It occupies 25,670 square feet of Square 1080E, Lot 0803, which also includes the land west to the Sousa Bridge and the Anacostia Community Boathouse, located immediately west of Seafarers. The land on which the club sits is comprised of dredged material taken from the Anacostia and deposited behind a seawall, completed in 1922, as part of the reclamation of the Anacostia Flats. The Seafarers have a license for their facilities from the District of Columbia, which owns the underlying land.

The Seafarers' parcel curves along the seawall along its south and east and abuts M Street SE to the north. Directly across M Street are the CSX rail lines, which cross the river just northeast of the property. To the immediate east is the substantial Anacostia Community Boathouse, built in 2010 as a temporary trussed structure sheathed in polyethylene sheets. The lot is fully

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enclosed with chain link fencing approximately 4' high along the river and 8' high along M Street. Eight foot tall gates are located at each of the four entrances to the club's docks. The property contains a clubhouse, wheelhouse, storage shed, marine railway, ceremonial flagpole, and three docks, consisting of piers, floats, and catwalks. The buildings and objects are set within a grassy lawn with a paved driveway loop and parking areas.

Anacostia Seawall (Non-Contributing)

The Anacostia Seawall, located on both sides of the Anacostia River, was previously determined to be contributing to the National Register-eligible Anacostia Park Historic District. The walls were built as part of the reclamation of the Anacostia Flats, the process that created the land that forms Anacostia. The wall in front of the Seafarers was completed in 1922 and is not considered contributing because it predates the club. It is constructed is coursed stone and runs along the entire southeastern border of the property, except where it was removed for a boat ramp.

Clubhouse (Contributing)

The design for the Seafarers clubhouse was conceived by member George Stockton, Sr. and constructed largely by members Charles "Bob" Martin and his son Charles "Chubby" Martin in 1964. The 50' x 32' building has concrete block walls and an asphalt shingle gable roof with deep eaves. The two primary doors face east at opposite ends of this façade. Each is a full glass, metal door accessed on the south end by steps with pipe railings flanked by concrete block planters built in on either side. The matching north steps were replaced by a reoriented stair and landing with an accessible ramp with horizontal wire railing in 2015. This elevation also features two wood bow windows between the doors, each with 12 panes. The windows sit on brick sills comprised of two courses of rowlocks. Between them is a panel where the concrete blocks are laid in a stacked, rather than running bond.

The river-facing south side is composed of a symmetrical window system of three large, fixed, wood-framed panes on either side of a central metal jalousie window. The jalousie window lies in the same plane as the wall, while the flanking windows slant inwards from top to bottom, resembling a ship's wheelhouse. These windows were specially made for the building before construction started. The slant of the windows allows for built-in planters on either side of the base of the jalousie window. A large Seafarers insignia decorates the gable.

The west façade is obscured by plant overgrowth but consists of a kitchen addition of about ten feet wide that is set in at both north and south ends. There are no windows on the west or north sides. A solid metal door provides access via a ramp on the south side. The siding of the addition is composite paneling and the shed roof is asphalt shingle.

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The north side is composed of concrete block with composite paneling in the gable. Two windows that once lit the restrooms have been infilled and finished with a parge coat. An unenclosed shed-roofed storage area sits off the northwest corner of the building.

The interior of the clubhouse is primarily occupied by a large open gathering space with concrete block walls and a metal frame lay-in ceiling. The floor is carpeted around an engineered wood dance floor. The north wall is clad in vertically oriented beadboard with a center break that provides access to restrooms on either side. Storage closets are located at the northeast and northwest corners of the room, the latter being the original kitchen. A larger galley kitchen addition was subsequently placed on the west side of the building.

Wheelhouse (Contributing)

The 24' x 14' concrete block wheelhouse was constructed in 1964 for storage and to protect the motorized winch for the club's railway. It replaces an earlier structure in the same location that is visible in aerial photographs as early as 1949, although it likely dates to 1947 when Seafarers obtained their lease. The building is slightly taller in the front (southwest) and features a shed roof clad in asphalt shingles. This roof projects over the facade approximately two feet and the rafters are visible underneath the eave. The roof framing is otherwise sheathed by metal siding. The facade features a door opening with a metal gate, but no door, and a multipane metal window backed by a metal hopper window that opens toward the interior. The sides are unfenestrated and the rear has three horizontal slot vents just under the roof edge. Another rectilinear opening under the front window provides an opening for the winch cable that connects the railway to the motor. The interior is unfinished with unpainted concrete block walls and 2x8 rafters supporting the plywood roof.

Docks (Non-Contributing)

There are three docks serving Seafarers, each comprised of a pier that leads to double-loaded floating docks. The A and F Docks, at the western and eastern ends, respectively, are constructed of metal open web trusses on pilings with lumber decking. The E Dock, between them, is all wood. The piers likely date to the second half of the 1960s, when the Seafarers merged with the D.C. Mariners. The floats and catwalks, however, are newer and their configuration has changed several times over the years. Prior to the current structures, boats docked perpendicular to the shoreline in individual slips. The current configuration dates to the 1980s or 1990s and the longer docks allow boats to be situated further out into the channel. Between the E and F Docks, there is one slip for a single boat to dock perpendicular to shore, a remnant of how all boats used to tie up at the club. This slip holds the boat belonging to D.C. Mariners founder Charles "Bob" Martin.

Each dock is accessed through a tall chain link metal gate. These gates remain at the C Dock and G Dock even though these structures have been abandoned and only pilings remain.

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Because of the changes to the orientation and configuration of the docks and the more recent construction date of the E Dock, floats, and catwalks, they are not considered contributing. However, their presence at Seafarers is important and central to the purpose of the club.

Boat Ramp (Contributing)

The boat ramp is the oldest feature on the property, likely dating to 1947 soon after Seafarers obtained their lease. The concrete ramp is of unknown length and leads to an inlet dug for the purpose of lowering boats into the river and hoisting them out. The ramp and inlet sit between the E Dock and the individual boat slip.

Marine Railway (Contributing)

Along with the boat ramp, the marine railway dates to c. 1947. It appears to be a handmade device, assembled of metal beams of varying dimensions. Parts of the carriage have been replaced, but it is believed that the track, wheels, and wood ties are original.

Flagpole (Non-Contributing)

The flagpole is comprised of a metal pole holding the U.S. flag above a yardarm from which hang the District of Columbia flag and the Seafarers burgee. The flagpole is set into a partially above-ground concrete base. Originally located on land, the flagpole was set at the end of the C Dock in the 1980s. Due to damage to the dock, the decision was made to relocate it back to shore in 2014. It is believed that the current flagpole was purchased at this time. Although the flagpole is not considered contributing due to its recent vintage, such nautical flagpoles are quintessential to boating clubs so that each club can be identified by its burgee from the water. They create the site for annual flag-raising ceremonies, which mark the beginning of the boating season.

Shed (Non-Contributing)

A storage shed, measuring approximately 10' x 12' was built in 2019 at the eastern end of the property. The frame building is sheathed in painted plywood and has no windows. A solid metal door provides access through the south façade and the shed roof slopes down to the north with an overhang on the south face that imitates the appearance of the wheelhouse.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/Black
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1945-1971

Significant Dates

1945

1964

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Charles Martin

George Stockton, Sr.

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Summary of Significance

The Seafarers Yacht Club was established in 1945 by and for African American motorboaters in Washington DC. The club is the oldest operational black boating club in the United States. As such, it was the first to join the American Power Boat Association, on whose circuit the club's boat won a number of races. Despite discriminatory practices exhibited by both the federal government and private businesses, the club's members managed to forge a name for themselves and their club and to develop Seafarers into the District of Columbia institution it is today. At a time when the Anacostia was stigmatized as Washington's "other" river, the Seafarers defended and promoted it, partnering with the African American Environmental Association and creating the first Anacostia River Cleanup Day, now a widely popular and effective annual event.

The Seafarers Yacht Club was determined eligible for listing in 2015, pursuant to an application to use federal funding for façade improvements under HUD's Community Development Block Grant program.

HISTORIC OVERVIEW

The Seafarers Yacht Club was the brainchild of mariner, craftsman, and boat builder Lewis Thomas Green (1896-1976), who founded the club in 1945. Mr. Green graduated from Hampton Institute (now University) with a major in masonry and a minor in woodworking. He taught in and served as principal of several southern schools before beginning a career in DC's black public education system. During his 33 year tenure in DC, he taught woodworking and mechanical drawing at Phelps Vocational School, Browne and Shaw Junior High, Armstrong Technical High School, and Dunbar High School from 1926 through 1959, and also served as an assistant to the principal of Browne.¹

Green began building boats in the late 1930s or early 1940s. He sold his first and used the funds to buy materials for the second, his own 49-foot cruiser, completed in 1944 and named *Valeria* after his daughter. He used plans published in boating magazines and built everything by hand, teaching himself, "electrical installation, installation of marine engines, wood caulking and numerous related trades."² To work on his projects – both personal and commissioned - he initially utilized "small boat yards in the shadow of the Sousa Bridge."³

As early as 1942, Green began to seek a place of his own to dock and work on boats. He targeted the west bank of the Anacostia River where he had already been working and which

¹ "The Retirement of Mr. Lewis T. Green, June 30, 1959." D.C. Board of Education Meeting Minutes, vol. 101, May 20, 1959. Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives Collection.

² "Idea in Boats." *Pulse*, November 1944.

³ *Ibid.*

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provided good moorage. Several boatyards and boat clubs were already located here, but the clubs were for whites only and it is likely that the yards also frowned on his race. Instead, Green sought to lease his own parcel from the U.S. Department of the Interior, which controlled all riverfront property at the time.

The club recounts that his request for a lease was initially denied because of his race, which led to the involvement of African American educator and civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune.⁴ Bethune served in the Roosevelt administration as Director of Negro Affairs at the National Youth Administration, and was known to hold sway over both the President and First Lady on African American issues. Through Bethune's intercession, Green was advised that an application made by an organization, rather than an individual, might be more successful in obtaining a lease, as this would have been seen as a more public use of federally owned land.

In late 1946, the Department of the Interior drafted a plat of the land to be granted by permit to the Seafarers Boat Club and issued a lease on February 1, 1947. Signing on behalf of the nascent Seafarers were L.R. Evans, President and Lewis T. Green, Secretary-Treasurer. The lease was for a swampy parcel at the far end of M Street on Reservation 343 within Anacostia Park. According to Charles "Bob" Martin, a later Commodore of the club, "they gave Mr. Green about the worst piece of land on the river...way down at the very end, next to the railroad tracks, where there was nothing else."⁵

The parcel was leased to Seafarers for the express purpose of "boat dockage" and provided 200 feet of land adjacent to the Anacostia Seawall. The club paid \$16.67 per month for just over half an acre and was allowed to make improvements in support of the new use. The parcel would become known as Green's Boat Yard.

Little is known about Seafarers or Green's Boat Yard during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Aerial photos from this period show that a small building (office) and slips had been built, the latter occupied by boats presumably belonging in part to members of Seafarers. Newspaper advertisements list boats for sale at Green's Boat Yard sporadically from at least 1950 through 1961.

According to Martin, the early members of Seafarers were "'doctors and lawyers and Indian chiefs, people with a little money.'"⁶ But by the late 1950s, the problems that were to become synonymous with the Anacostia River were starting to make things difficult at the club. Pollution was pervasive and the river was beginning to silt up in its northern reaches. Black professionals no longer wanted to be associated with the stigmatized Anacostia. Seafarers was losing members.

⁴ Legerwood, Roger and Barnhart, Sandra. "Seafarers Yacht Club: Club History 1945-2020."

⁵ Dermody, Ann. "A Club of Their Own." *BoatUS Magazine*, March 2009.

⁶ Dermody, Ann.

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During this same period, another group of black mariners formed the D.C. Mariners Boat Club.⁷ This organization, whose members also rented dock space at Green's, provided "African-Americans the opportunity to engage in the enjoyment of the waterways through safe boating and gentlemanly sportsmanship."⁸ D.C. Mariners was started by Charles "Bob" Martin, who grew up in Capitol Hill in what he calls a "no, no, no house. No electric, no bath, no nothing.... Everything was a no for a black man or a colored person at the time."⁹ The no's extended to an early attempt to go boating when Martin was denied the opportunity to rent a boat with a friend based on their race, which Martin credits as the catalyst for his determination to own his own craft.¹⁰ At Browne Junior High School, Martin took woodshop with none other than Lewis Green and learned boatbuilding skills in his class. It wasn't long after that he built his first boat, a canoe-kayak, by using plans published in *Popular Mechanics* and other magazines.¹¹

According to a *Washington Post* story on Seafarers, "As Martin grew, so did his boats."¹² By the 1950s, his work in construction had allowed him to afford not only a sizable craft, but leisure time to found a club of fellow black boaters called the D.C. Mariners. The club members met the first Sunday of the month in each other's homes during the colder months. In warmer weather, they met at Green's Boat Yard, which was, of course, one of the rare options open to black mariners. Within the first few years, the D.C. Mariners incorporated and ratified a Constitution and By-Laws for operation.

In 1959, a faction of wealthier members split off to form Seafarers Yacht Club of Annapolis, leaving the more blue-collar D.C. Mariners with a roster of about a dozen members. The club's membership rose to 21 by 1963, and included an early female captain, Lucille Hicks, who was elected Secretary. Around this time, the D.C. Mariners began discussions with Green, on behalf of Seafarers, to take over the yard. The records are not clear, but one account indicates that Green may have run into difficulties with the Department of the Interior for subletting space to the D.C. Mariners when the lease was for Seafarers. At any rate, Green had retired from teaching and was ready to let go of the yard. Because of the importance of keeping it available to African Americans in a city strictly divided by race, he and Martin devised a plan for the D.C. Mariners to take over the lease. Martin remembered first discussing the idea with Seafarers of Annapolis to get their point of view, but "'this was a different time. They thought we'd get ourselves in trouble with the government, that they'd confiscate our boats.'"¹³

⁷ Much of the information on D.C. Mariners comes from their handwritten meeting minutes, available from October 1963-October 1965.

⁸ Legerwood and Barnhart.

⁹ Brown, DeNeen. "The Story of the Seafarers Yacht Club, One of the Nation's Oldest Black Yacht Clubs." *Washington Post Magazine*, 29 September 2011.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Dermody, Ann.

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In October 1963, the D.C. Mariners voted to purchase Green's improvements to the parcel, including the docks, marine railway, a small building used by Green's Boat Yard as an office and storage, and a metal garage building. By the end of the year, a contract was drawn up between Green and the D.C. Mariners. The club agreed to pay \$3500, \$2000 of which was paid in cash raised by \$100 pledges from each member. The remainder was to be paid in monthly installments of \$100, which would be garnered by collecting current and outstanding fees for dock rentals.

The land lease with the Department of the Interior remained an issue, however. A plan was formulated for the D.C. Mariners to join Seafarers and take on the Seafarers name. Then Green would send a letter updating the Department with the current Commodore's name, Harold Putman, and would formally resign from the club himself.

The newly merged clubs wasted no time in taking over management of Green's improvements to the property. They began making repairs to the railway and docks in January 1964, raised member dues, and collected dockage fees for non-member boats. Eviction notices were served on two boat owners who were in arrears for fees. Plans were underway to purchase pilings and Georgia pine for piers and catwalks, as well as renting a pile driver. During this time, membership increased, as did the club's bank account. A Women's Auxiliary and a Junior Boat Club, both comprised of family members, were formed. All members pitched in spruce up the grounds, paint the facilities, and install lighting. New concrete was poured for the boat ramp.

In 1964, the club built a concrete block shed, calling it the "wheelhouse," to replace an existing structure that covered the railway winch. The boatyard's metal garage had been used for meetings, but was replaced in 1964 in the same location with a 2500 square foot clubhouse, whose design is attributed to Seafarer George Stockton, Sr. The concrete block building features specially designed windows that slant outward at the top and resemble a ship's pilothouse from both the exterior and interior. Other distinctive elements are built-in planters on the south and east sides and a pair of bow windows on the east side. The interior was designed as a large open room with a small kitchen, bathrooms, and a storage closet at the north end. The wheelhouse and clubhouse were largely built by Charles Martin and his son "Chubby." Martin was able to obtain materials through his contacts in the construction field. In December 1964, the Seafarers held their first meeting in the new clubhouse, which Martin claimed was designed to be "the best looking building on this waterfront."¹⁴

By September 1965, the D.C. Mariners were officially referring to themselves as the Seafarers Boat Club. Letterhead was printed and new Seafarers patches were sewn over the D.C. Mariners logo on caps, shirts and jackets. The club's insignia of a sea dragon holding up an

¹⁴ Interview with Charles Martin

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anchor and compass was conceived by Stockton, who had experience with the federal government designing patches for the military.

By-Laws for the Seafarers established financial requirements for membership, dock rental fees, and the club's conduct policies. Members would receive fines and/or demerit points for such infractions as "conduct unbecoming that of a Seafarer," "failure to carry out fair share of work on club projects and yearly maintenance," mishandling a boat, and not cleaning the clubhouse after use.¹⁵

The club was also fully aware of their responsibilities under the government lease and members were reminded of "things going on at the yard which could cost [sic] the Interior Department to close our lease, such as loudness, profanity, drunkenness, and most of all our action." The social aspects of club membership, while occasionally becoming boisterous on site, were mostly reserved for organized affairs. An annual Valentine's Day dance with hired band was hosted at African American venues such as Glenarden's Town Hall, the Presidential Arms Hotel, and the Spotlight Room in northeast DC. Summer cruises went to King's Beach, Columbia Beach, Longview, Point Lookout, and other black-friendly destinations. November's Frostbite Cruise was the last organized outing of the year.

The Seafarers soon joined the race circuit, pooling their money to buy a racing boat and two 100 horsepower engines. They joined the American Power Boat Association (APBA) as the first African American club in 1965.¹⁶ Their boat *Pookie* caused a stir at the APBA's notable Hudson River Marathon that year. One racer described the event as having "the roughest water I've ever seen, anywhere. Smooth at the beginning, but somewhere before West Point it became an ocean. We fell off a wave coming around West Point that felt like it was two stories high. The boat twisted so hard that the side cracked vertically in two places."¹⁷ Despite the conditions, *Pookie* came in sixth with one engine blown in a field of 72 boats, only half of which finished the race.¹⁸ The following year, the Seafarers placed 13th out of 180 competitors.¹⁹ With *Pookie*, they also won four first place trophies at short races at the popular African American regattas at Columbia Beach in Maryland and second place at a long haul race from Richmond to Jamestown and back.²⁰

Within two years, the Seafarers race team had acquired a second boat, *Pookie II*, and took both first and second place at a Williamsburg race. The team handled all boat maintenance themselves and shared towing responsibilities. Without the sponsorship that other race teams enjoyed, they mostly attended regional races to avoid the expenses of overnight trips. Racers

¹⁵ By-Laws.

¹⁶ "Seafarers Club 'Old Salts' at Power Boat Racing," *Afro*, 30 April 1966.

¹⁷ March, Ted. *Boat Racing Facts Forum*. <http://www.boatracingfacts.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-4272.html>, 6 April 2007.

¹⁸ "Seafarers Club 'Old Salts' at Power Boat Racing."

¹⁹ Sell, Carl. "Bitten by Speedboat Bug: JJ Team Ready for Big Year," *Evening Star* 19 May 1967, p. F-4.

²⁰ "Seafarers Club 'Old Salts' at Power Boat Racing."

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included Thomas Butler, a retired painter; Elmer Diggs, civilian paymaster for the Marine Corps; James Whiting, a television technician; Harold Putman and George Stockton, Sr., both of whom would become Seafarers Commodores; Barnard Lucas; and L.R. Evans, who had signed the initial land lease as President of Seafarers.²¹

In 1968, the Seafarers Boat Club hosted a water parade from their docks on the Anacostia to the Washington Channel and as far up the Potomac as the Watergate. They returned to Hains Point, where they put on a water show and waterskiing exhibition.²²

Despite their obvious success, an uncertainty has plagued the Seafarers and its fellow Anacostia boathouses – Washington Yacht Club, District Yacht Club, and Eastern Power Boat Club – throughout their history. As described in the National Register nomination for the Washington Yacht Club,

The underlying land along the District's waterfront is almost entirely government owned and each club has had to negotiate – and in some instances fight for – the right to remain on the river. Leases have been sought variously through the War Department, Army Corps of Engineers, Department of the Interior, the District of Columbia Commissioners, Redevelopment Land Agency, Department of Parks and Recreation, and/or the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, depending on the location and date of the agreement.

The confusing jurisdiction and multiple transfers of ownership are due in part to the city's historic lack of home rule and its control by the federal government. Early decisions regarding the Anacostia were passed from federal agency to federal agency, most of them dedicated to infrastructure and navigation. While business interests clamored for the opportunity to develop along the Anacostia's banks, the government decided to place sewer outfalls (and later a sewage pumping station and treatment facility) on the Anacostia and provided funding to keep the river dredged only as far north as to the Navy Yard.

The threat that the clubs could be forced to relocate became real when the Eastern Power Boat Club and Washington Yacht Club had to move multiple times during the reclamation of the Anacostia Flats. More recently, the National Park Service began turning over administration of its property in 1968 as talks of instituting Home Rule in the District of Columbia accelerated.

The possibility that they might lose their club, coupled with the worsening pollution problem in the Anacostia, called for action. Seafarers led the charge in creating the Anacostia Boating Association (ABA), which formed in 1972. This umbrella organization aimed to protect the interests of the four Anacostia boathouses, located on what is now called Boathouse Row. As

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² "Boating News." *Evening Star* 2 August 1968, p. A-20.

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stated in the ABA by-laws, "the objects of this association shall be to provide a mechanism by which member clubs can provide united planning and contribute resources toward the advancement of boating in its broadest sense."²³ The officers included a Commander, Vice Commander, the Commodores of each of the founding clubs, and a secretary and treasurer, who were members of one of the clubs and full or part boat owners. Membership was open to any "boat club or organization organized to promote recreational boating in the metropolitan Washington area."²⁴ The ABA took into account appearances, allowing for Association funds to be used for property maintenance in an effort to head off any cause for withdrawing their leases. Among those who signed a draft of the by-laws were Bob Martin, who was now Commodore of Seafarers and George Stockton Sr., who was named Commander of the ABA.

The Seafarers also joined the Potomac River Yacht Clubs Association, which represents 23 member clubs, and officially changed their name from Boat Club to Yacht Club. Seafarer Howard Gasaway, Sr. became the first black Commodore of the Association in 1987 and was subsequently appointed Vice Admiral of the Potomac River and Admiral of the Anacostia River for life by the late Mayor Marion S. Barry, Jr.²⁵

Under Gasaway's leadership, the Seafarers became early champions of the health of the Anacostia River, which had become notorious as one of the nation's dirtiest waterways. With the encouragement of Mayor Barry, the Seafarers hosted the first Anacostia River Cleanup Day in 1985. In 1987, they were joined by the other Anacostia boat clubs as well as the Potomac River Yacht Clubs Association. The cleanup has since grown into "a DC-area tradition where thousands of volunteers clean up sites all along the Anacostia River and its tributary streams throughout the watershed in DC, Prince George's and Montgomery Counties," managed by the Anacostia Watershed Society.²⁶ It is an annual community-wide effort with District and Federal agency participation and assistance from various environmental groups. For his accomplishments, Gasaway received the 1991 Stewardship Award for environmental advocacy jointly from the Governor of Maryland and the Mayor of the District and was formally recognized by the Anacostia Watershed Society for his leadership in cleaning up the river.²⁷ To this day, Gasaway commits that "every chance we get to promote the Anacostia, we will."²⁸

Environmental awareness activities at the club were bolstered in the 1990s, in partnership with the African American Environmentalist Association (AAEA). The AAEA was founded by noted environmentalist Norris McDonald, who was also a member of Seafarers Yacht Club. McDonald

²³ "Proposed By-Laws of the Anacostia Boating Association." With handwritten edits and signed by Commodores of all four Anacostia Boathouses and Commander of the ABA. 13 August 1972.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Gasaway doc

²⁶ Anacostia Watershed Society. "Earth Day Cleanup April 24, 2021," <https://www.anacostiaws.org/what-we-do/river-restoration-projects/earth-day.html>.

²⁷ Gasaway doc.

²⁸ Interview with Gasaway.

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advocated not just for the environment, but for the participation of African Americans in protecting it. He secured grant funds to teach the city's black youth about environmental stewardship, and classes took place at the Seafarers clubhouse. The AAEA used the Seafarers facilities to dock its 22-foot Boston Whaler, which was used for instruction and for tours of the polluted river.

In 1996, the Washington DC area suffered from the remnants of Hurricane Fran, and both the Anacostia and Potomac River overflowed their banks. The original office for Green's Boat Yard was significantly damaged by flooding and was later removed. In 2000, the Seafarers were featured at the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival as part of the "Washington, DC: It's Our Home" exhibit. Harkening back to their roots with Lewis Green, the Seafarers gave a demonstration in boatbuilding and discussed their boating legacy with the public.

In 2015, Captain Robert "Tony" Ford of Seafarers spearheaded an effort first for Seafarers, then expanded to include all four Anacostia boathouses, to apply for funding for repairs and upgrades to their facilities. On behalf of all the clubs, Seafarers applied for and received Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grants. Seafarer Joseph Quarterman prepared plans for each clubhouse. At the Seafarers Yacht Club, the grant provided funds for an accessible ramp and new signage at the north entrance to the clubhouse, repairs under the north and south gables, and installation of the club's insignia on the south façade facing the river. It was during this grant process that all four clubs were determined eligible by the State Historic Preservation Office.

Today, there are 45 active members of the Seafarers Yacht Club, which are classified as Regular (with a boat docked at the marina), Associate, Lifetime, and Honorary.

SEAFARERS IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN BOATING

Because of the various low bridges over the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, as well as their unnavigable waters upstream of the city, motorized boating proved a much more appealing way to experience the waters of D.C. than sailing. Early clubs that included motorboat owners among their members were the Capital Yacht Club (1892), Corinthian Yacht Club (1903), Eastern Power Boat Club (1905), Washington Yacht Club (1910) as well as others further down the Potomac and on the Chesapeake Bay. What all of these organizations shared was a ban on African American members.

Seafarers Yacht Club responded to this inequality and is likely the oldest extant African American boat club in the country. There are earlier, passing mentions in newspapers of the Old Man River Yacht Club, possibly in Cleveland, and the Twentieth Century Boat Club in Harlem, but because of the single reference to each, it is believed they were short-lived.

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Further, it is not entirely clear if they were truly organized clubs, whether they were for sailing or motorized boats, or even if they were for blacks or whites. The Swanky Yacht Club of New York was a longer lasting African American organization, but was in actuality a social club which rented yachts or barges on which to hold their soirees. Even in that great city, there was no place for a black sailor to dock at least through 1948, when a group of African Americans purchased a yacht, but were no longer allowed to dock it where it had been on the East River. They had to travel 45 miles from Harlem, stopping at various boat yards and piers along the way, before finding a place that would allow them to leave their 45-foot vessel.²⁹

The Shore Island Yacht Club of Lee Haven, Connecticut no longer exists, but was an African American club formed by 1948, when it held what was incorrectly touted as the first regatta for black boaters on the east coast.³⁰ That honor belongs to the Columbia Beach Boat Club in Maryland, where many Seafarers participated in the races. Columbia Beach was also one of the oldest black boat clubs in the country, but it was more loosely organized among a summers-only crowd and no longer exists³¹. The Golden Key Yacht Club of Atlantic City was another early African American club, established in 1959. Closer to home, the Neptune Yacht Club of Baltimore (late 1950s), and the Seafarers of Annapolis (1959) both included DC Seafarers among their membership.

At the time Seafarers was established in 1945, there were several boat yards and marine dealers along Boathouse Row in addition to the Washington Yacht Club (moved to current site in 1925) and Eastern Power Boat Club (moved in 1922). The District Yacht Club was established in the 1950s and took over one of these yards. City Directories from the 1940s list Dean's, District, and Charley's Boat Yards below the Sousa Bridge, Harris and Jackson and Beach Boat Yards just at the bridge, and Trummell's, Millers, and Al Wells above it, in addition to several facilities on the Washington Channel and Potomac. It was at one of these yards where Green initially built his boats, but felt compelled to leave. Green's Boat Yard, the home of the Seafarers, was located at the end of this row of marine businesses at the far northern tip of M Street. It is likely the only marine establishment to have served people of color in the city.

Leases for these boatyards have been discontinued over the years while the clubs remain, although all four have suffered uncertainty about their future presence on the Anacostia. The National Register nomination for the Washington Yacht Club provides some context:

Concurrent with the government control over clubhouse and marina locations was a pervading view of the Anacostia as a less important river than the Potomac. The bias

²⁹ "Group Goes 45 Miles to Rent Dock Space." *Afro-American*, 17 May 1947, p. 5.

³⁰ "Mother of 2 Wins 'Miss Nymphite' Title in Lee Haven Beach Contest." *Afro-American*, 11 September 1948, p. 10.

³¹ Cox, Pearlle. "Pearlie's Prattle." *Afro-American*, 19 August 1950, p. 9 and Fletcher, Patsy. *Historically African American Leisure Destinations Around Washington, D.C.* Charleston: The History Press, 2015.

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was inherent from Washington's very foundations when the Anacostia was dubbed the Eastern Branch of the Potomac, not even given the identity of its own name. For a variety of reasons, including the Potomac River's navigable waters to the well-established port at Georgetown, the western location of the Washington Monument and other national memorials, agricultural policy, and planning decisions, both the federal and District governments gave priority to the Potomac River and the Anacostia was left to handle the city's sewerage and stormwater - and to silt up over the years.

The river also became a symbol of the city's racial and economic divide. Its decline mirrors the federal and municipal government's forced exodus of African American residents to its east side through planning decisions, urban renewal, race restrictive covenants, and environmental policies, all of which helped to institutionalize racial segregation in Washington DC with the Anacostia River forming the boundary. Neighborhoods such as Anacostia, Twining City, Randle Highlands, and others in Southeast, formerly white suburbs, fell victim to "white flight" as those who could afford to moved to new suburban tracts in Maryland and Virginia.

These trends affected the boat clubs and boating culture in Washington. As John Wennersten explains it in his book *Anacostia: The Death and Life of an American River*, "Recreational boating in the Washington metropolitan area reveals stark polarities of race and class on the rivers." During the long period of racial segregation, "it was only on the Anacostia that black mariners could find boat slips for their craft." Seafarer's [sic] Yacht Club was established explicitly because of the unwritten policy to exclude African Americans from membership in DC's boating clubs.³²

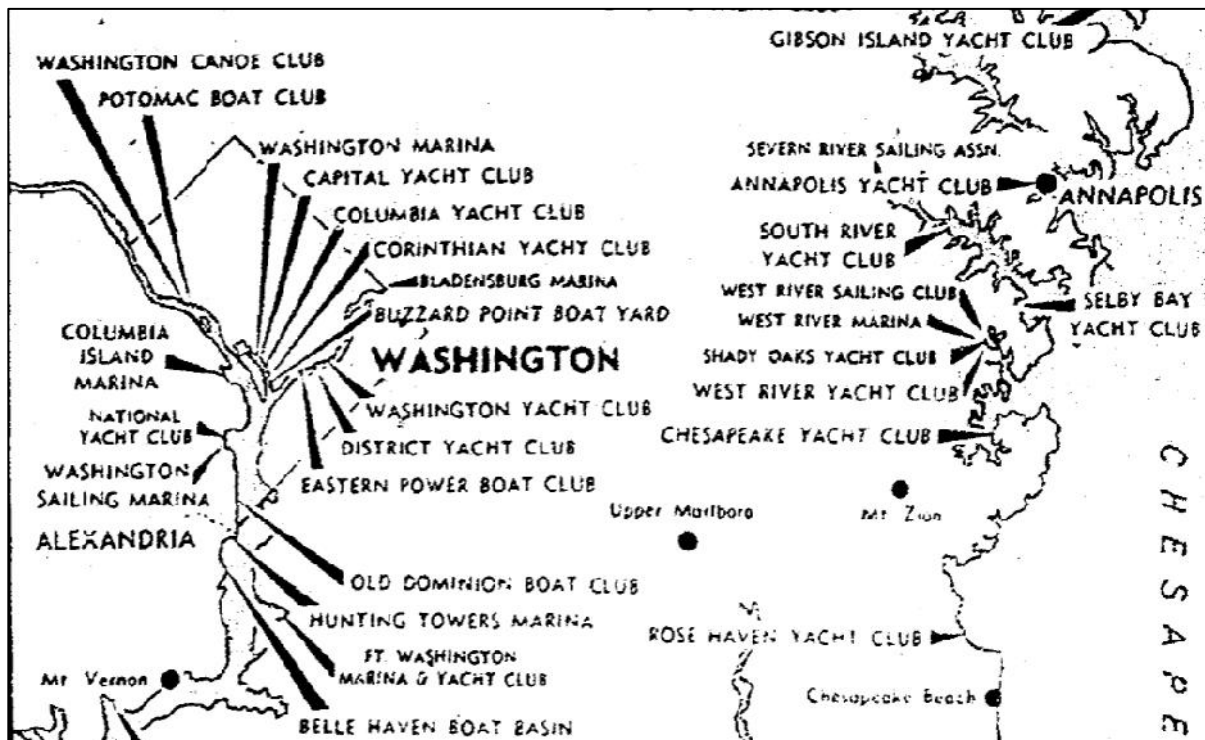
The map below, published in 1959 in the *Evening Star*, shows the boat clubs, yards, and marinas in the area.³³ It notably omits both Seafarers DC and Annapolis as well as Green's Boat Yard and D.C. Mariners, either making the assumption that black-only organizations were not of interest or considering them unworthy of mention. But things were about to change for the area's whites-only organizations.

³² Brockett, Anne. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for Washington Yacht Club, 6 January 2020.

³³ Covell, Charles. "Improvements Ready for Boatmen." *Evening Star*, 3 April 1959, p. E-5.

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The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbade discrimination in public facilities, including at property rented from the federal government. Leading up to its passage, many local jurisdictions also began enforcing a non-discrimination policy. In 1962, the big boating communities of Cleveland and Chicago were investigating boat clubs on city-owned land for discrimination. In Chicago, the Burnham Park Yacht Club's lease was revoked and then reinstated after the club ousted its biased president and voted to accept two African American members. Similarly, the Detroit Parks and Recreation Department indicated in 1969 that it was taking legal steps to evict the Detroit Yacht Club and Detroit Boat Club from city-owned parkland for policies that excluded Jews and people of color.³⁴ As late as 1976, African Americans, and in this case also a Jewish man, had to sue for membership in the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club in Miami.³⁵

Within the District of Columbia, the Corinthian Yacht Club lost its lease with the Department of the Interior in 1964 after it refused to consider the application for membership of well-known African American businessman Theodore Hagans. Hagans met all applicant requirements, including sponsorship by two current members and payment of a deposit. He also owned a 52-foot motor yacht in need of a home.³⁶

³⁴ "Detroit Group Seeking Eviction of Yacht Clubs." *Afro-American*. 25 January 1969, p. 15.

³⁵ "Two to Appeal Ruling on Yacht Club." *Afro-American* 1 May 1976, p. 8.

³⁶ "Bars Negro Applicant, Yacht Club Loses Lease." *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 May 1964, p. 2.

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The desegregation led to a nationwide expansion of boating among African Americans, highlighted and encouraged in widely read publications such as the *Chicago Defender*, *Afro-American*, and *Ebony*.³⁷ Seafarers thrived as the other clubs on Boathouse Row lost many of their white members, “who did not wish to be associated with African Americans or the suffering Anacostia River anymore.”³⁸ While other clubs opted to disband, relocate to privately owned land, or were required to include African Americans, the Seafarers Yacht Club continued its proud tradition of welcoming black mariners.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Seafarers Yacht Club includes a number of “firsts” in its history. In addition to being the oldest extant African American boat club in the United States, Seafarers was the first black club to join the American Power Boat Association, the first to provide the Potomac River Yacht Clubs Association with a black commodore, and creator of the first Anacostia River Cleanup Day – now a 35-year legacy event. The club also has associations with and shares the location of the first business to willingly serve black mariners in the District of Columbia.

Seafarers has been recognized by many historical and cultural organizations in the District of Columbia. It is featured on the city’s African American Heritage Trail for its importance in the city’s black history and on the D.C. Preservation League’s Civil Rights Trail because it “represents a step in the long process of equal access to public facilities.” The 2018 exhibit *Belonging: Stories from the Seafarers Yacht Club of Washington, DC* was designed as the inaugural show at the Philips Collection’s Philips@THEARC. This exhibit “celebrate[d] the achievements and ongoing contributions of The Seafarers Yacht Club of Washington, DC, the first African American Yacht Club in the United States, located in Southeast DC, along the Anacostia River.”

In 2000, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival included a section called Washington, D.C.: It’s Our Home, which “showed the vibrancy of local communities that live in the shadow of national institutions.” Among the programs was an exhibition on boatbuilding given by the Seafarers. The Smithsonian concluded that:

Overall, the Festival this year demonstrated that, while people may be subject to modern forms of colonization, to unequal power and economic arrangements, and to marginalization, exile, and strife in many forms, they use their cultural traditions as sources of strength, resistance, and creativity to cope with and overcome their travail. Culture, after all, is a means of human adaptation. Just because people may be

³⁷ Mantell, Jim. “Boat Clubs Growing.” *Chicago Defender* 16 August 1975, p. B4.

³⁸ Brockett, Anne.

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economically poor or politically powerless does not necessarily mean that their cultures are brittle or bereft of value.³⁹

Seafarers has also been featured in numerous articles that denote its rich legacy. It is the subject of a film produced by the American University Anthropology Department entitled *Seafarers: A Place on the River*. Most recently, the D.C. Council recognized Seafarers on its 75th anniversary, citing “their dedication to keeping the Anacostia River clean, and their important cultural contributions to the District of Columbia.”⁴⁰

Along with these recognitions of its historical importance, the Seafarers Yacht Club is eligible for listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places under District of Columbia Criterion b (history) and National Register Criterion A (history). The club is emblematic of the nationwide struggle of African Americans for equal access to facilities and fair treatment, particularly by government agencies. From Lewis T. Green’s pioneering efforts with the U.S. Department of the Interior to provide black mariners with a place that welcomed them and their boats, through successes in a largely white-dominated racing field, through efforts to prove their worth in order to retain their lease, to raising awareness of the importance of Washington’s “other river,” the Seafarers Yacht Club remains a vital part of the Anacostia waterfront. In an era of stark segregation, the Seafarers fought for, built, and remain in their clubhouse on the Anacostia, the river for which they continue to advocate.

The Seafarers Yacht Club property includes two contributing buildings (clubhouse and wheelhouse), three contributing structures (railway, ramp and Anacostia Seawall) and the non-contributing docks, shed, and flagpole on its original and plot of a half-acre. It retains all the hallmarks of a boat club with a window wall in its clubhouse facing the expanse of the Anacostia River, outdoor space for enjoyment of members and guests, and its marine facilities that clearly denote their function. Its integrity of location, design, feeling, association, materials, and craftsmanship remain intact, although the setting has been compromised by the construction of the Anacostia Community Boathouse immediately to the west. The period of significance extends from 1945, when the club was established through 1985, when the Seafarers launched the Anacostia River Cleanup Day.

The club remains on the west bank of the Anacostia River as an embodiment of the achievements made collectively and by individual members. Though its buildings and structures are modest and simply constructed, the site is imbued with historical significance. The Seafarers Yacht Club forged a parallel path alongside the white boating community and is a

³⁹ Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. “Smithsonian Folklife Festival Records: 2000 Smithsonian Folklife Festival,” 2017, p. 3.

⁴⁰ A Ceremonial Resolution, 23-244, in the Council of the District of Columbia, 4 February 2020.

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physical reminder not only of the policies and practices that segregated blacks and whites, but the proud resilience needed to overcome them.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

See footnotes

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☒ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☒ Other

Name of repository: Seafarers Yacht Club

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _____

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Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

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Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

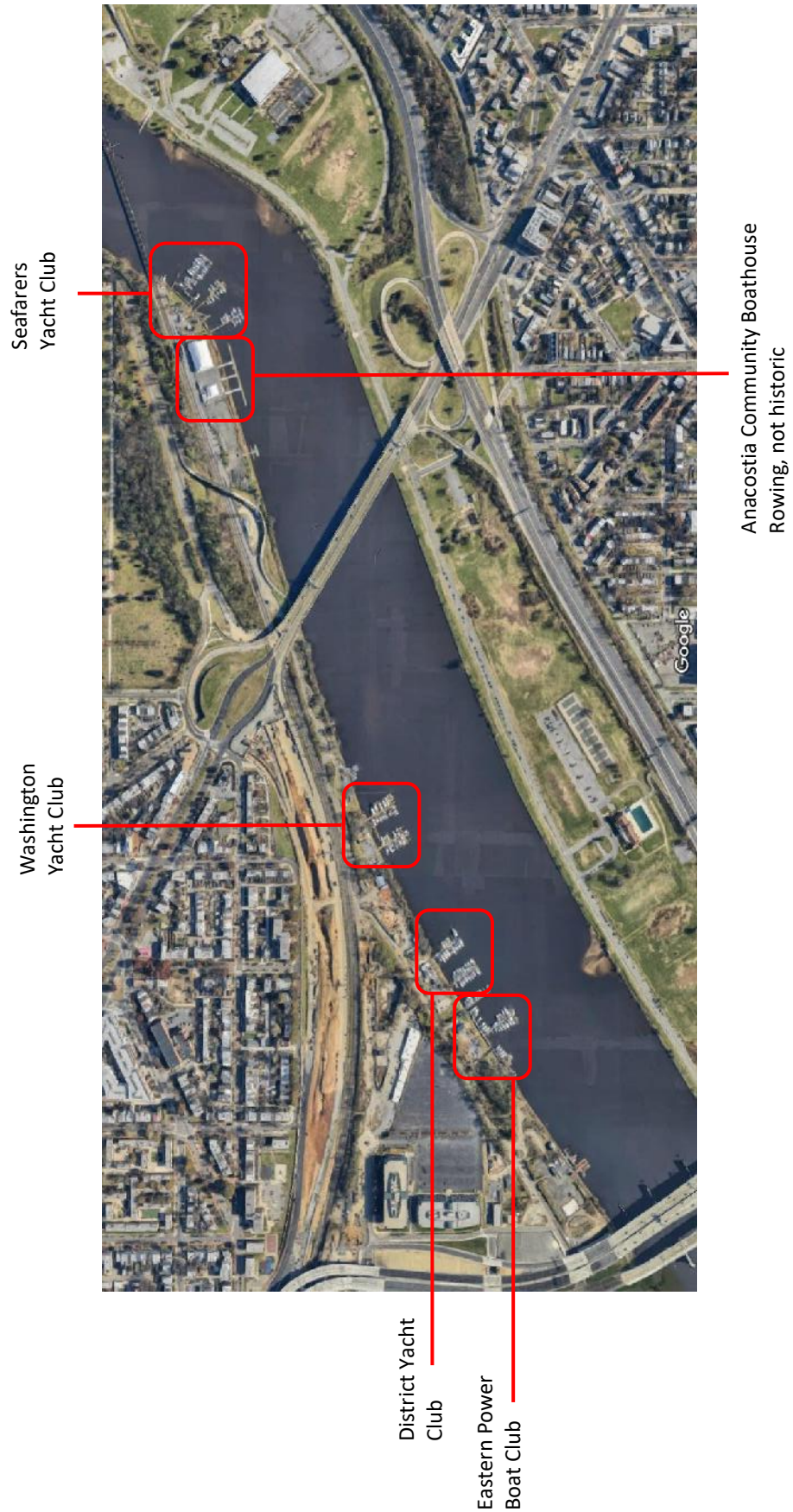
11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Anne Brockett, Architectural Historian
organization: D.C. State Historic Preservation Office
street & number: 1100 4th Street SW
city or town: Washington state: D.C. zip code: 20002
e-mail anne.brockett@dc.gov
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date: September 21, 2021

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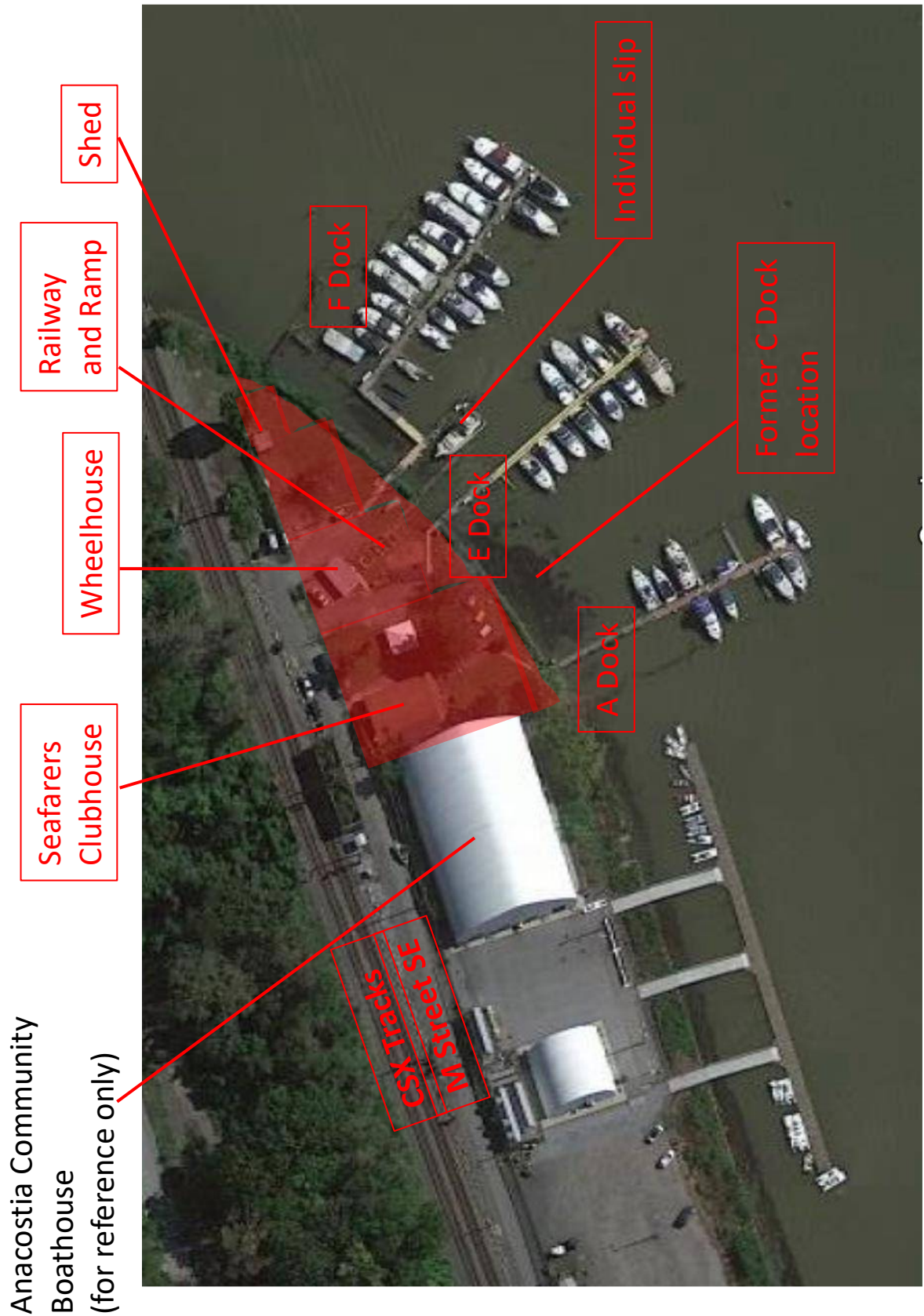
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Anacostia Boathouses



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Photographs



Seafarers Yacht Club Clubhouse, south (left) and east (right) sides



Seafarers Yacht Club Clubhouse, south side

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Seafarers Yacht Club Clubhouse, east (left) and north (right) sides



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Clubhouse, northwest corner shed

Flagpole, looking west



Wheelhouse, west and south sides. Marine railway at right



Wheelhouse, north and west sides

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Shed, west side



Shed, south and east sides

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Marine Railway and Boat Ramp



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Marine Railway on Boat Ramp. E Dock in background



View of grounds looking west from the F Dock



View of the grounds looking east from the Clubhouse

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View looking southeast of the gate to the former C Dock with the E and Docks beyond. The individual slip with yacht is at the far left under the tree branch



View looking southwest toward the former C Dock and A Dock beyond

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Clubhouse interior looking south



Clubhouse interior looking north

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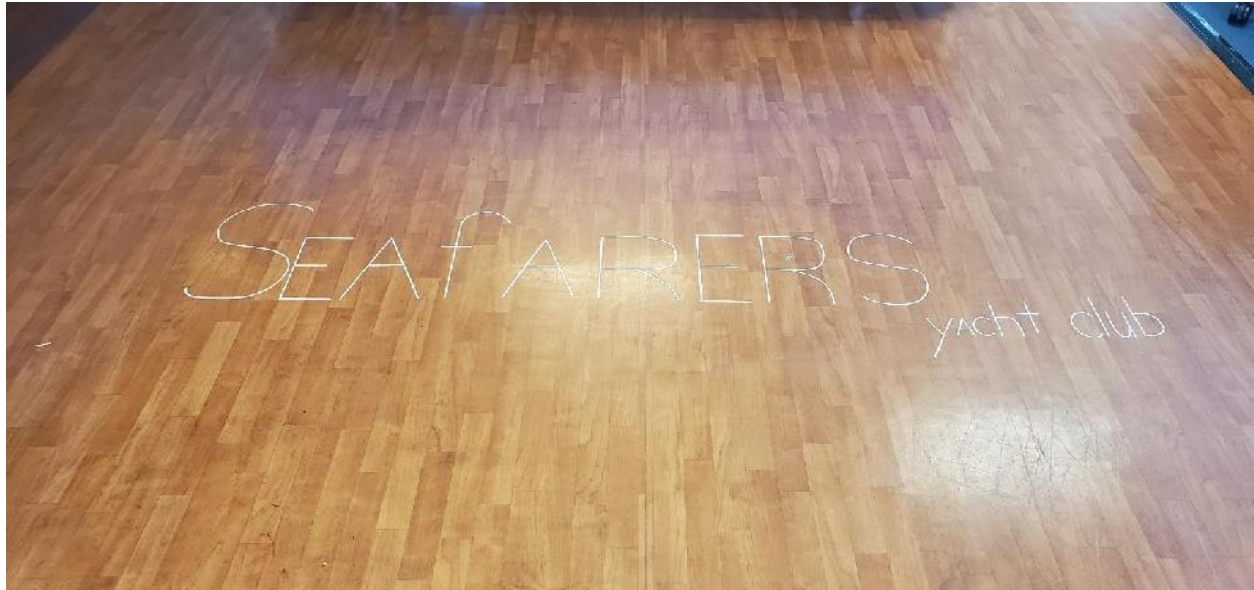
Clubhouse kitchen



Clubhouse interior. Detail of south windows.

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Clubhouse dance floor detail



Seafarers insignia

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Former office for Green's Boat Yard, west and south sides, demolished c. 2000



Former office for Green's Boat Yard, east and north sides, demolished c. 2000