

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word process, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Hydroelectric Power Plant (preferred)

other names Potomac Power Plant

2. Location

street & number Potomac Street extended, along Potomac River.

☐ not for publication

city or town Harpers Ferry

☐ vicinity

state WV code WV County Jefferson code 037 zip code 25425

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying officer/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying officer/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

I hereby, certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ Determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Hydroelectric Power Plant
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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☐ public-local
☒ public-State
☒ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ District
☐ Site
☐ Structure
☐ Object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
1		structures
		objects
2		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Historic Properties of Harpers Ferry National Historical
Park

**number of contributing resource previously
listed in the National Register**

1

6. Function of Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Industry/manufacturing facility

Industry/energy facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Landscape/park

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Early 20th century industrial

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Stone

Walls Brick

Roof Metal

Other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

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Physical Description:

The Hydroelectric Power Plant is located on the south bank of the Potomac River at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. The building sits at the eastern end of a dry power canal constructed early in the 19th century. Immediately southwest of the building and canal are the tracks of the B & O Railroad and the remnants of Potomac Street extended. The property around the building is overgrown with low weeds. The power plant building is a two-story brick structure on stone foundation with a series of 4 water flumes leading under the building. It is three bays wide at the gable ends with brick arched door/loading bay/window and a small round window opening above in each gable peak. There are five bays in the southwest elevation, three brick arched windows, one loading bay, and one triple window with 6 over 6 sash windows and a wide wood, slightly arched lintel. There is some decorative detail in brick along the cornice line. The façade of the building fronting on the river (the northeast elevation) has four evenly spaced window bays, each with a segmentally arched top. The roof is of channeled metal with one round aluminum vent extending from the peak. A steel I-beam frame stands along the exterior of the southwestern elevation. Extending from the northwestern gable end, at foundation level, is a series of three more flumes, probably from the earlier, larger pulp mill building. West of the building can be seen an iron, water control gate structure set into the stone walls of the power canal.

The interior of the power plant consists of one large space with two small office enclosures partitioned off in diagonal corners, north and south. Steel trusses support the roof. Two large generators located in the center of the space dominate the interior. Most of the interior features remain intact from the period that the power plant was used from 1925 to 1991. However, a fire which occurred in 1998 damaged the north office area. This fire did not impair the physical integrity of the building.

Two contributing resources include the power plant building and the canal (a structure).

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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 pattern of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property 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 as yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- ☐ **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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Industry

Architecture

Period of Significance

1834 – 1991

Significant Dates

1925

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (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 # WV-61

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

HABS/HAER Records Division

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Statement of Significance:

The Hydroelectric Power Plant is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with three of the major contributing water-powered industries in the Harpers Ferry economy from 1799 to 1991. Following the Civil War, when the Federal Government began to pull out of Harpers Ferry as a dominant employer, the subsequent industries which occupied the former U. S. Armory Rolling Mill site played important roles in the continuation of water-powered industry in Harpers Ferry. The power plant building is significant under National Register Criterion C for its architectural integrity as an early 20th century water-powered electric plant. The building retains much of its machinery used during its operation from 1925 to 1991. Parts of the building date from earlier structures, which also occupied this site, at least some of the stone foundations date from the 1853 Rolling Mill and possibly from the 1834 Tilt-Hammer Shop. The Harpers Ferry Hydroelectric Power Plant is part of the Multiple Property Documentation entitled "Historic Properties of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park." The building and the associated power canal and its associated structures, are significant within the historic context of Industrial Development of Water Power as an Industrial Resource property type. While the period of significance for the power plant extends to 1991, the predominant significance was more than 50 years ago.

Resource History

The Hydroelectric Power Plant, also known as the Potomac Power Plant, was recently extensively researched for the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), for which a draft report No. WV-61 has been produced. The HAER report includes detailed information about the history of the building and building site, as well as the machinery from various periods of use of the site where the Hydroelectric Power Plant now stands. HAER Report No. WV-61 is used here as a principal source of information concerning the history of the power plant.

Beginning in 1799, the United States Government located a musket factory and arsenal on the confluence of the powerful Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers at the little settlement known as Harpers Ferry. The water from the rivers supplied the power that ran the operations associated with the various buildings in the armory complex. Among the United States Armory buildings located at Harpers Ferry, was the Rolling Mill (Building No. 18) built in 1853 on the foundations of the earlier, 1834 Tilt-Hammer Shop.¹ Throughout the years of the Civil War 1861-1864, all of the buildings of the Federally owned armory, with the exception of the now-famous Fire Engine House (John Brown's Fort), were burned repeatedly by both the Union and

¹ National Register Nomination, "Harpers Ferry Historic District, Jefferson Co., WV" 1979, Item 7, Page 2.

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Confederate armies. Undoubtedly these were difficult years for the people of Harpers Ferry, nearly all of them employees of the arsenal and armory facilities.

The greatest blow to the Harpers Ferry community came immediately following the Civil War, when the U.S. Government decided not to rebuild its armory and arsenal, which had been the main industry and employer in the town for 60 years. In 1868, a Congressional Act authorized the sale of Federal Government lands at a public auction. The armory, arsenal and waterpower rights were sold to Captain F.C. Adams, representing the "Harpers Ferry Manufacturing and Water Power Co." Adams' real plan for the property, to sue the B&O Railroad Co. for its passage across former armory property, was soon discovered and the Adams purchase, bought on credit and never paid, was eventually returned to Federal ownership.²

In 1884 the Federal government again put up for sale its holdings at Harpers Ferry. This time the armory grounds on both the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, as well as the water rights, were purchased by Thomas H. Savery for the purpose of establishing The Shenandoah Pulp Company on Virginus Island in 1888, and the Harpers Ferry Paper Company on the foundations of the old armory rolling mill along the Potomac River in 1889. The new milling businesses of Savery and Co. encouraged a community struggling to reinvent its industrial base. This sentiment was expressed by Joseph Barry in his book The Strange Story of Harper's Ferry, written several years after the opening of the Savery and Co. mills; "The new firm-Savery [sic] and Co.- are evidently good business men, and it would appear as if they had come to stay, and give a start to a new Harpers Ferry."³ A May 1889 local mention in the Spirit of Jefferson noted that the Harpers Ferry Pulp and Paper Co. was "about to become a paying business."⁴ Such enthusiasm, however, was probably not well placed. The two Savery and Co. mills were never large employers and workers were not highly paid. Built during a rapid expansion of the pulp and paper mill industry, the mills at Harpers Ferry produced financial hardship for their owner due to plummeting paper prices. Profits reported by the Harpers Ferry Paper Co. in 1903, after more than 20 years of operation reached only \$18,993, and by 1906 had fallen to \$5,045.⁵ Finally, in 1925 the Harpers Ferry Paper Company suffered extensive damage from a fire.

²James P. Noffsinger, Harpers Ferry West Virginia, Contributions Towards a Physical History, bound manuscript, 1958, Harpers Ferry NHP Library, Harpers Ferry, WV, pp. 50-52.

³Joseph Barry, The Strange Story of Harper's Ferry, The Shepherdstown Register, Shepherdstown WV, 1979 (first printing 1903), p. 173.

⁴Spirit of Jefferson, May 7, 1889, newspaper microfilm collection, Harpers Ferry NHP Library, Harpers Ferry, WV.

⁵"Potomac Power Plant," HAER draft report No. WV-61, p. 14.

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Beginning around the turn of the 20th century, the Harpers Ferry Power and Light Company came into being. The brainchild of the Savery family late in the 19th century, a Spirit of Jefferson newspaper article announced their idea in 1898:

The Pulp Mills at Harpers Ferry have a maximum capacity of 4,000 hp, and for some time the owners have considered the question of turning half of this power into an electric power plant, to supply the different industries at Charles Town and vicinity, with all the power necessary to run their plants as well as lighting Harpers Ferry and Charles Town.⁶

John Livers of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania initially ran the operation, but by 1899 Thomas Savery was President and owner of Harpers Ferry Electric Light and Power Company (HFEL&P Co.). By 1904, HFEL&P Co. was providing electricity not only for Harpers Ferry's streetlights, but for the town of Brunswick, Maryland as well.⁷ Housed in the upper story of the main Harpers Ferry Paper Co. mill building, the HFEL&P Co. was described by the 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map as running "at night only- 2 dynos [sic] operated by water power," while the paper company continued to run "day and night."⁸ The companion arrangement of the two companies was apparently not unusual, owing to common space and turbine power requirements, and continued until the 1925 fire, which damaged the building.⁹

Personal records of the Savery family, researched for the "Potomac Power Plant" HAER report, indicate the Savery brothers had been trying to find a buyer for their unprofitable paper mills in Harpers Ferry. According to the HAER report, the 1925 fire may have enhanced their chances for that eventual sale: "The fire conveniently eliminated the least profitable part of their operation, pulp-making, and with the fire insurance payments, allowed the brothers and their associates to rebuild a smaller and modernized plant more suited solely to hydroelectric generation. The new mill building was completed by June of 1925, new electrical equipment. was added later that year, and the search for a buyer continued."¹⁰ The Harpers Ferry Electric Light & Power Company was sold in 1928 to the National Electric Power Company, a subsidiary company of the Virginia Public Service Company. The little brick power plant then passed through a series of sales between the Virginia Public Service Company and the Potomac Edison Company (under the names of Potomac Light and Power Co., Potomac Edison Co. of

⁶Ibid, p. 17, Spirit of Jefferson, March 22, 1898.

⁷"Potomac Power Plant" HAER draft report No. WV-61, p. 18.

⁸Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1922, WVU Archives, Morgantown, WV.

⁹HAER draft Report No. WV-61, p. 19, quote from Duncan Hay, Hydroelectric Development in the United States, 1880-1940 (Washington, DC: Edison Electric Institute, 1991).

¹⁰"Potomac Power Plant" HAER draft report No. WV-61, p. 22; see also references in report to the Savery Family Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

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West Virginia, and finally, Allegheny Power). The power plant operated until 1991, providing power for the Harpers Ferry community. With the closure of the plant, came the end of nearly two centuries of water-powered industry in Harpers Ferry.¹¹

Resource Evaluation:

The Harpers Ferry Hydroelectric Power Plant is part of the Multiple Property Documentation entitled "Historic Properties of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park." The building, and the associated power canal and structures, are significant within the historic context of Industrial Development of Water Power as an Industrial Resource property type. The power plant building retains its integrity to its use as a hydroelectric power plant, including machinery still located inside the building. Its setting, along the river and beside the railroad and power canal, retains remarkable integrity to the historic associations of the site.

The Power Plant is a remarkably intact example of late 19th - early 20th century industrial architecture. Although its design is unremarkable, the history associated with the building, its setting, and its material makes it a singular building. The HAER report (HAER No. WV-61) documented the use of materials from the successive industrial buildings associated with the site in the construction of the extant power plant building. The sense of historic layering in the building and at this site is extremely powerful. HAER historian, Dean Herrin notes, "In fact, the building is an icon of Harpers Ferry industry, and like a crazy quilt, is composed of fragments of significant meaning."¹²

¹¹HAER draft report No. WV-61, pp. 24-26.

¹²Ibid, p. 27.

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Major Bibliographical References:

Barry, Joseph, The Strange Story of Harper's Ferry, The Shepherdstown Register, Shepherdstown WV, 1979 (first printing 1903).

Gilbert, Dave, Where Industry Failed, Water-Powered Mills at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., Charleston, WV, 1984.

National Register Nomination Form, "Harpers Ferry National Historical Park," 1981.

National Register Nomination, "Harpers Ferry Historic District, Jefferson County, WV," 1979.

Newspaper Microfilm Collection, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park Library, Harpers Ferry, WV.

Noffsinger, James P. Harpers Ferry West Virginia, Contributions Towards a Physical History, bound manuscript, 1958, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park Library, Harpers Ferry, WV.

"Potomac Power Plant," HAER draft report No. WV-61, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, Harpers Ferry, WV.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1907, 1922, 1933, West Virginia University Archives, Morgantown, WV.

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 48.18 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	Zone	Easting	Northing	3	Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Edith Wallace, Research Associate

organization Paula S. Reed and Associates, Inc.

Date June, 1999 rev. 12/00

street & number 105 N. Potomac Street

telephone 301-739-2070

city or town Hagerstown

state Maryland

zip code 21740

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

street & number PO Box 65

telephone 304-535-6298

city or town Harpers Ferry

state WV

zip code 25425

Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et. seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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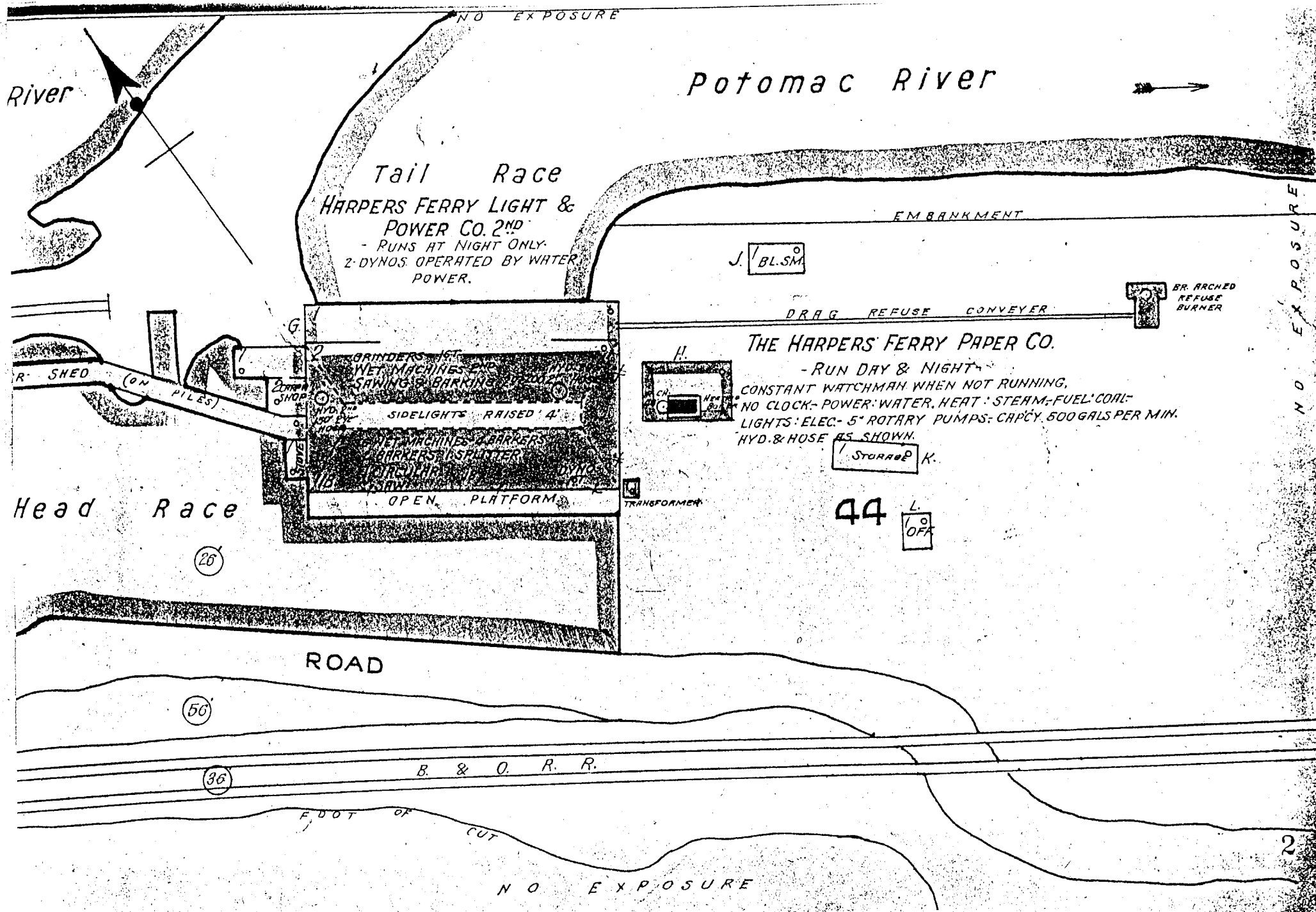
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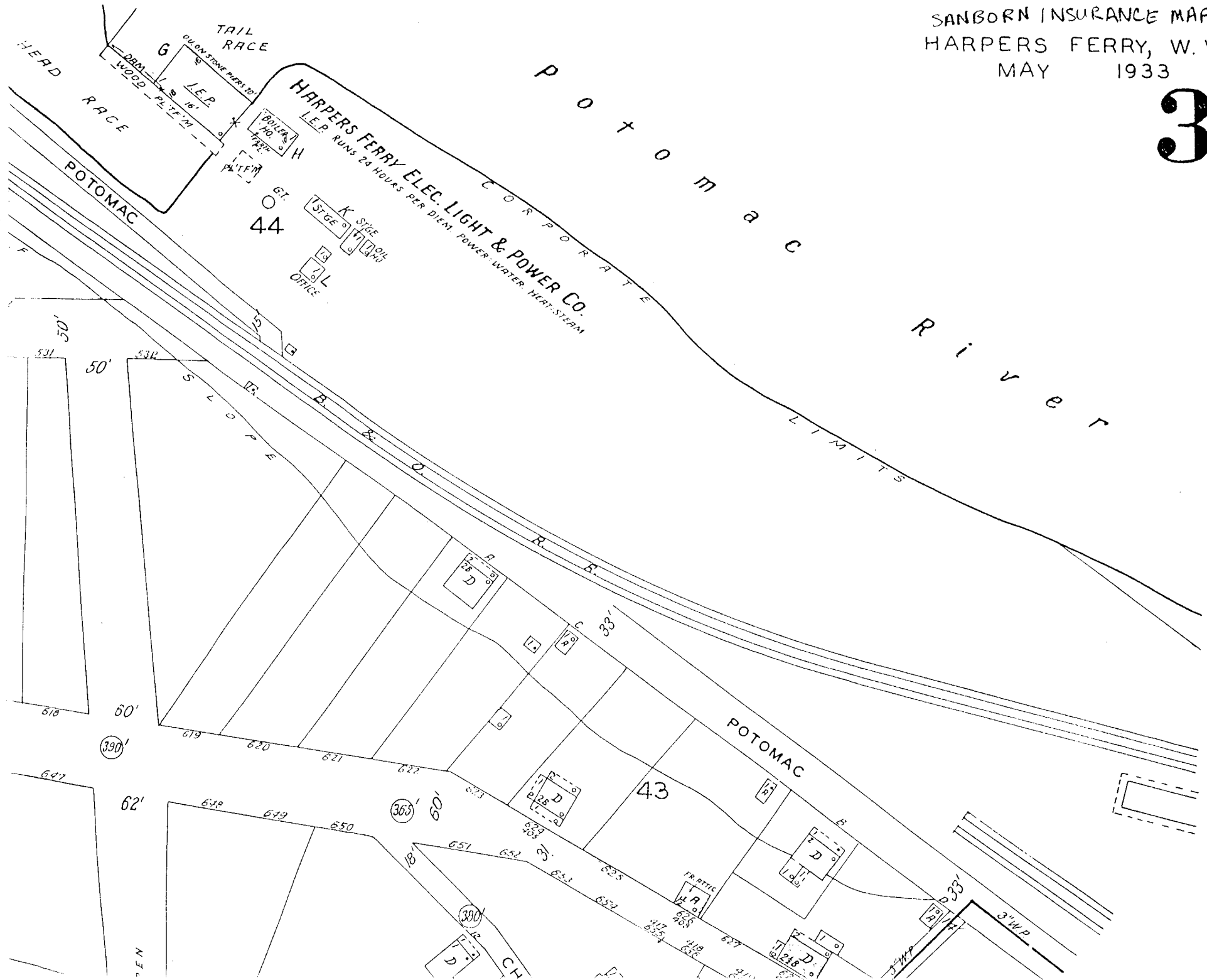
Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundaries are described by the 1918 survey map drafted to show the B&O Railroad right-of-way for Track V-36.1/1 through Savery and Co. property. The same map was later used in the Potomac Light and Power Co. deed, and finally in the 1984 deed for USA Tract 101-06, Jefferson Co. Land Record 565/307. The tract contains 48.18 acres, bordered on the north by the Potomac River, on the south along the cliffs of Camp Hill, and is bisected by the B&O Railroad right-of-way.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the entire Savery and Co. property as surveyed in 1918. These appear to be the historic boundaries of the U. S. Government property associated with the musket factory, as delineated on the 1869 S. Howell Brown Map of Harpers Ferry.

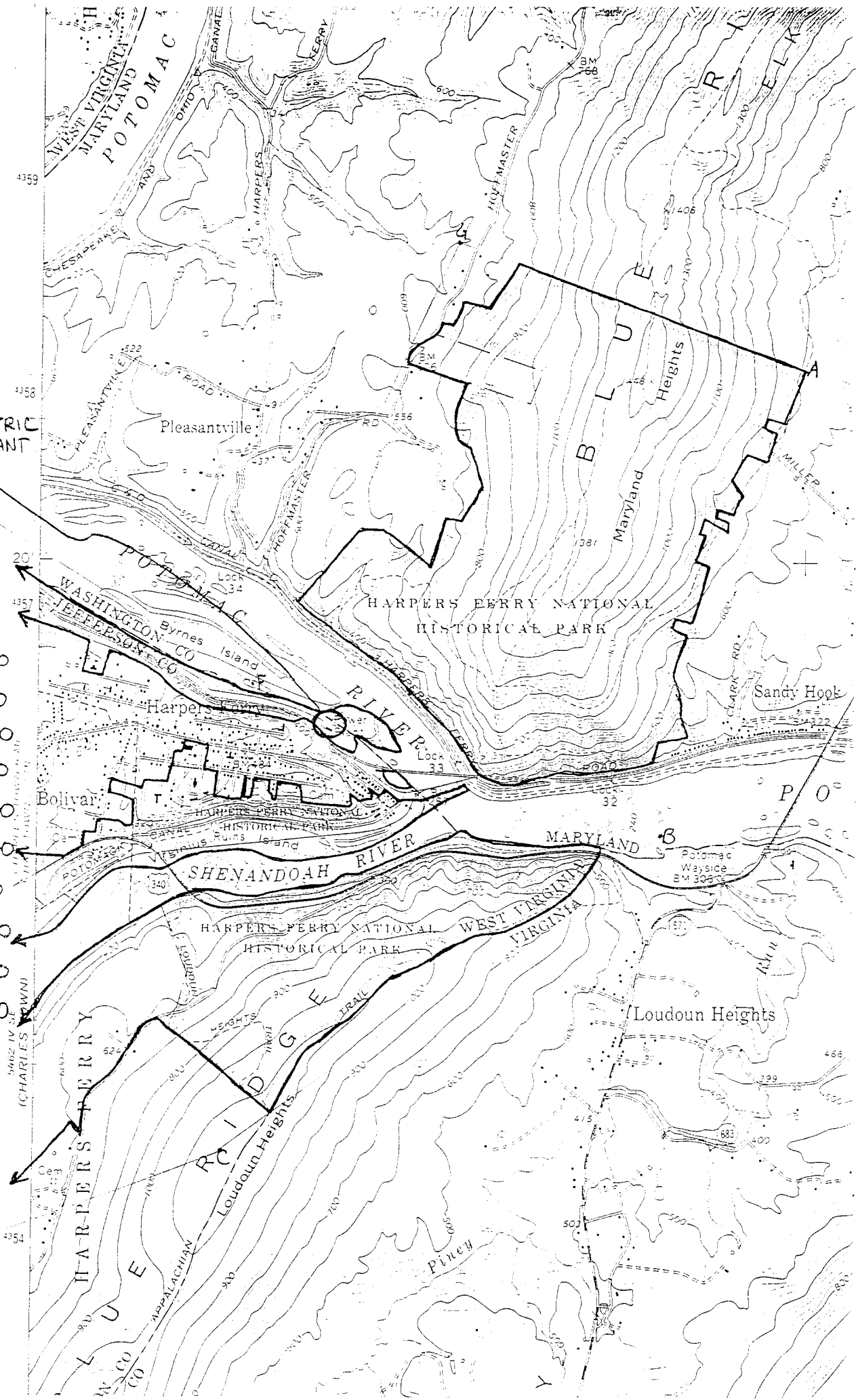


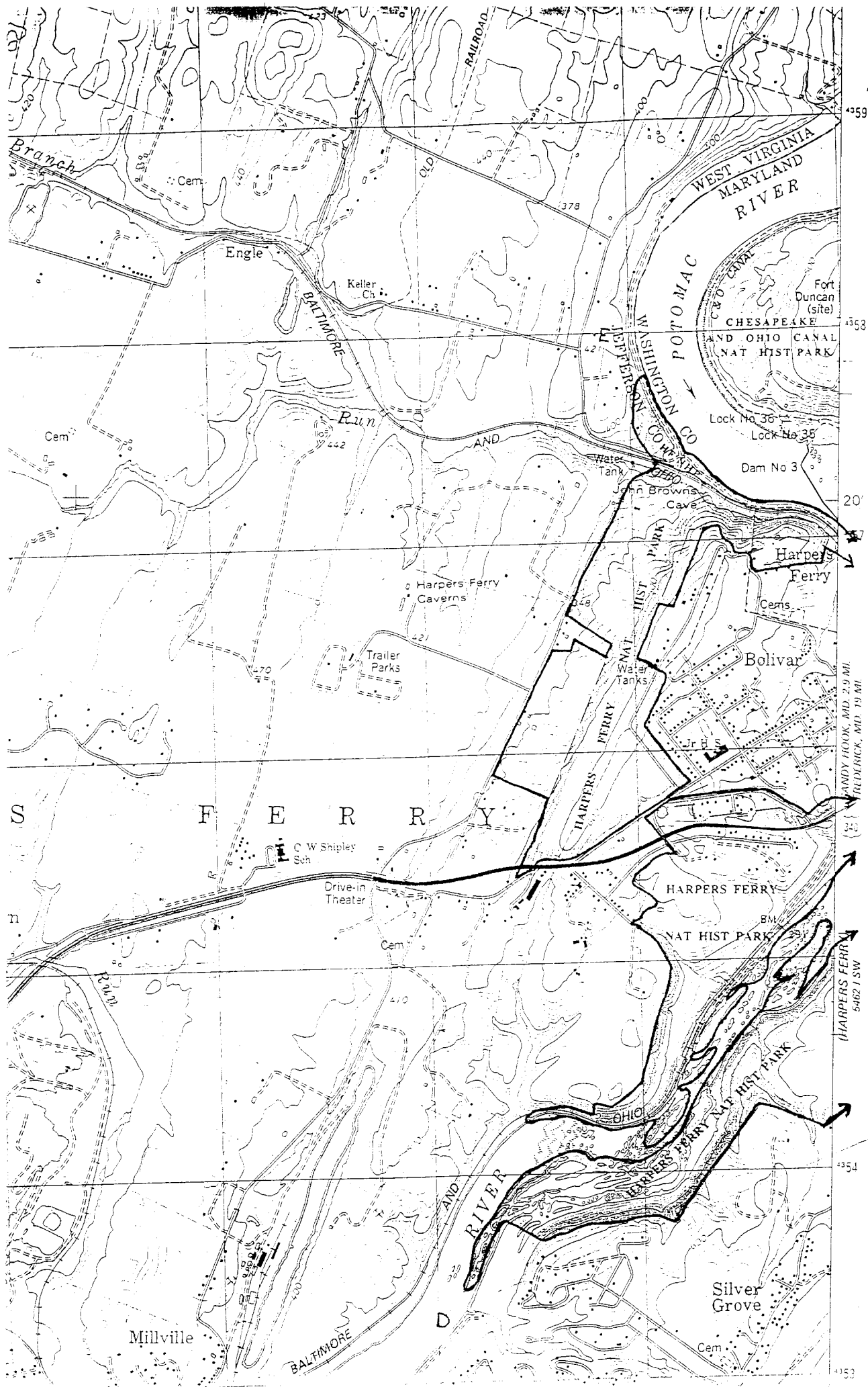


HARPERS FERRY NHP UTM REFERENCES:

- A 18/266590/4357980
- B 18/265840/4355790
- C 18/263800/4354380
- F 18/263960/4356560
- G 18/264980/4358600
- H 18/269780/4355600
- I 18/266890/4353110
- J 18/266670/4353600
- K 18/267610/4355360
- L 18/269180/4356100

HYDROELECTRIC
POWER PLANT





HARPERS FERRY NH
UTM REFERENCES

D 18/261030/4353380

E 18/361880/4357920



RESTRICTED
AREA
KEEP OUT

