

FORM A - AREA

Assessor's Sheets

USGS Quad

Area Letter

Form Numbers in Area

48

Newburyport

BA 449,451  
2965-2977

Massachusetts Historical Commission  
220 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Town: Newburyport

Place (neighborhood or village):

Name of Area: Brown's Wharf

Present Use: Commercial, Offices

Construction Dates or Period: early 19th to present

Overall Condition: good

Major Intrusions and Alterations: considerable new construction since 1960

Acreage:

Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Newburyport Hist. Commission

Date (month/year): July 1999

Photograph

(3" x 3" or 3-1/2" x 5", black and white only)  
Label photos on back with town and addresses for all buildings shown. Record film roll and negative numbers here on the form. Staple 1-2 photos to left side of form over this space. Attach additional photos to continuation sheets.

roll negative(s)

8 0-13

Sketch Map

Draw a map of the area indicating properties within it. Circle and number properties for which individual inventory forms have been completed. Label streets including route numbers, if any. Attach a continuation sheet if space is not sufficient here. Indicate north.



AREA FORM

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

*Describe architectural, structural and landscape features and evaluate in terms of other areas within the community.*

Most of the buildings in the waterfront area bounded by Merrimac Street, Summer and Green Streets were constructed between the early 20th century and the present day. Many of the original structures in this area were destroyed by devastating fires in 1894 and 1934.

The oldest surviving building in the area is the commercial building at 40 Merrimac Street (MHC#449), opposite Green Street. The building appears to date to the late 18th or early 19th century. Its combination of brick construction with a gambrel roof makes it fairly unique in Newburyport. The 2 1/2-story building is constructed of brick laid in a Flemish bond. The predominant 2/2 sash dates to the late 19th century and replaces an original 8/8 sash. A concrete block addition was constructed at the rear of the building c. 1920 and more extensive concrete block additions with metal windows were constructed at the rear and side in the 1950s.

Located on Brown's Wharf is a three-story brick building (MHC#2966) which appears to have been constructed in the mid 19th century as a warehouse. Befitting its utilitarian nature, the gable-roofed building lacks ornament of any kind. After serving as a furniture warehouse for many years, the building was rehabbed c. 1990 for offices. All of the original windows were replaced with modern 1/1 sash and a two-story contemporary addition was constructed on the east end.

The former Ruth Shoe Co. building at 44 Merrimac Street (MHC#451) is typical of early 20th century industrial structures. Constructed in 1915 according to plans by G. W. Griffin, the bays of the three-story building are defined by shallow brick piers which rise the height of the building and outline the recessed windows. There is little in the way of architectural detail other than simple concrete sills and lintels, shallow corbeling above the upper story windows, a simple brick elevator tower, a front parapet and copper cornice. The building was renovated in 1982 and all of the original windows were replaced. The building now contains offices.

The small brick building at 42 Merrimac Street (MHC#2967) appears to have been built at the same time as the adjacent factory. It stands on the site of a two-story office which was roughly the same size, constructed for the Newburyport Car Company in the late 19th century. It is conceivable that the building incorporates part of the older building although stylistically it appears to date to the early 20th century. The single-story brick building is capped by a stepped parapet with concrete cap. The recessed entrance contains a glass-and-panel door which is flanked by a multi-glass display window on one side and a 1/1 replacement window on the other.

Within the area are several brick garages and repair shops which were constructed after the 1934 fire. The building at 92 Merrimac Street (MHC#2977) is a single-story brick building which steps back in two sections with a three-part parapet front. Incorporating steel girders, the bays are outlined by brick piers and contain metal 6 x 5 pane windows. Although it appears that this building was constructed post 1934 it may incorporate part of an old shoe factory building which was on the site until the 1934 fire. Just behind the former shoe factory at 44 Merrimac Street is a single-story brick storehouse (MHC#2969) constructed in 1946 according to Sanborn insurance maps. The yellow brick building was subsequently painted red and the brick surfaces are now spalling badly. Reinforced with steel trusses, the building displays a three-part parapet which is similar to 92 Merrimac Street (MHC#2977) and metal multi-light windows which are covered with metal grates. The single garage bay on the facade has been fitted with a modern garage door. An additional, single-story, gable-roofed garage/storage building (MHC#2973) is located on the road leading to McKay's Wharf. It is located roughly on the site of a former baby shoe factory which was destroyed in the 1934 fire. The 3 x 3-bay building is oriented with its gablefront facing Merrimac Street. The paired 4/4 wooden windows have concrete lintels and sills. A wood-shingled garage bay has been added on the west side.

Recommended as a National Register District. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

## INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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Area(s) Form No.

BA	
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## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

Parts of the large wood-frame boat shop at 58 Merrimac Street (MHC#2972) may date to the 1930s or 1940s but the building has been greatly expanded over the years. The two-story building is sheathed in a combination of board-and-batten siding, asphalt shingles and wood shingles. Fenestration includes a combination of 12/12 sash and 3 x 2-light windows with large sliding doors on the elevation facing the water.

The remaining buildings all appear to have been constructed since 1960. The Black Cow Restaurant (MHC#2968) is a clapboarded c.1980 building located on Brown's Wharf. Directly to the south the Hudson Building at 38 Merrimac Street (MHC#2965) is a two-story block with two concrete block sidewalls, a metal rear elevation and a wood-shingled facade. The c.1980 building has 8/8 and 1/1 windows. Hilton's at 54 Merrimac Street (MHC#2970) is a two-story metal building with a single-story rear addition. The south facing wall is painted with a whale mural. The Windward Yacht Yard at 58 Merrimac Street includes what appears to be a c.1980 wood-shingled cottage (MHC#2974) embellished by a gable roof with dormers and bay windows. The building rests on steel beams and nearby is a small gabled marina office (MHC#2975). The building at 58 Merrimac Street (MHC#2971) is a large, three-story brick building constructed c.1990. It is setback from Merrimac Street by a parking lot. The broad facade steps back with bands of glazed windows on each level and a central glazed entrance portico on the first floor.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Explain historical development of the area. Discuss how this area relates to the historical development of the community.*

What is now Merrimac Street existed as early as 1645, described as a "way to the river" and extending from the foot of Greenleaf's Lane (what is now State Street) to the foot of Ordway's Lane (the present Market Street).

After the year 1700 the number of wharves and docks constructed along the riverfront steadily increased. As early as 1730, Abiel Somerby was granted permission to build a wharf at the foot of Ordway's Lane (Market Street) that was subsequently designated "the upper long wharf". On the 1851 and 1872 maps this wharf is known as Patch's Wharf. To the south additional wharves were constructed, lined by warehouses and docks erected by various merchants. Horton's Wharf was located near the end of Titcomb Street and on the 1884 map was the location of the shipyard of A. Currier. Brown's Wharves were located between Titcomb and Green Streets. In the early 19th century Moses Brown had a large warehouse on the wharf at the foot of Green Street where he stored cargoes such as sugar and molasses. Moses Brown was a chaise maker in Newburyport as early as 1766. In the early to mid 19th century Piper and Haines owned a sail loft and store on Brown's Wharf.

In the early to mid 19th century the waterfront was lined by warehouses, coal sheds and maritime-related shops. The 1884 map shows the shipyard of A. Currier located on the wharf north of Brown's Wharves. From 1869 until 1885 B.F. Atkinson and John T. Fillmore had a shipyard at the foot of Titcomb Street. This boat yard was later taken over by Capt. McKay who moved from the foot of Federal Street in the 1880s. By the time of the 1894 map there was no trace of the shipyard. Other maritime-related businesses located in the area included warehouses, a rigging loft at Brown's Wharf, paint shops and coal sheds and trestles.

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued)

On May 19, 1934 the "Million Dollar" Fire destroyed almost every building on both sides of Merrimac Street from Winter Street and Bridge Road to Titcomb Street. The only portion of the Dodge Brothers' shoe factory that survived the 1934 fire was the power house. The shoe industry which had already fallen on hard times was unable to rebuild. Following the 1934 fire only the Ruth Shoe Co. at 44 Merrimac Street (MHC#451) was left in business. The company remained the largest and busiest shoe factory in the vicinity for many years but eventually went bankrupt in 1963. The building was purchased by Geonautics, Inc. in 1964.

In 1934 the Route 1 By-pass was constructed to the north of the study area, bringing additional automotive traffic to the area. After the 1934 fire a number of auto showrooms and filling stations were erected along Merrimac Street and Bridge Road and the area was known as "Gasoline Alley". Gas stations were constructed at 56, 85 and 92 Merrimac Street and on Bridge Road. The Volpone Ford Sales Room and Garage was located at 58 Merrimac Street from the 1950s until the early 1990s when the building at Horton's Landing was constructed.

Boat building on a somewhat smaller scale continued in the waterfront district in the early 20th century. About 1905 one of the former Newburyport Car Co. buildings was reused as a boat building facility, later known as Emmons Boat Shop in 1914. Additional smaller buildings serving as storehouses for boats, boat supplies and boat building were constructed on McKay's Wharf. After the 1934 these early boat shops were replaced by new buildings serving the same purposes. Marine activities gradually expanded to the Brown's Wharf areas as well.

Most of the buildings on Merrimac Street between Green and Titcomb Streets were demolished in 1969 as part of Urban Renewal. In 1971 a restaurant was constructed on the riverfront property owned by George Hilton off Merrimac Street. The restaurant was constructed by Hilton, Bert Reed and Mickey Villane. The building at the corner of Titcomb and Merrimac Streets, known over the years as the Washington House and later the Sedgewick House, burned in 1971.

The so-called Horton's Landing building at 54-64 Merrimac Street (MHC#2971) containing shops and condominiums was erected in the early 1990s on the former site of the Volpone Ford Sales & Garage. In recent years additional waterfront area on the north side of Brown's Wharf has been filled.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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## Maps

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Brown's Wharf

Source: Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. (E.I. neg. #11771)