RESOURCE EVALUATION

DATE: 7/10/15
STAFF: Linda Mackey & Daria Merwin

PROPERTY: “The Shacks” [Furgary Boat Club]

ADDRESS: North Front Street at Dock Street

PROJECT REF: 15PR02455

MCD: Hudson
COUNTY: Columbia
USN: 02140.000911

I. □ Property is individually listed on SR/NR:
   name of listing:
□ Property is a contributing component of a SR/NR district:
   name of district:

II. □ Property meets eligibility criteria.
□ Property contributes to a district which appears to meet eligibility criteria.
   Pre SRB: □ Post SRB: □ SRB date

Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:

A. □ Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;

B. □ Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;

C. □ Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possess high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;

D. □ Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Summary Statement

Based on the information provided, the property historically known as, and still referred to by former inhabitants as “The Shacks”, is eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C in the areas of maritime history, social history, and architecture. Located along the Hudson River at North Bay in the City of Hudson, “The Shacks”, or more recently referred to as the Furgary Boat Club, is a cluster of seventeen fishing cabins or “shacks”. In recent decades, the fishing shacks were used primarily for recreational purposes as seasonal camps, but Sanborn maps provide evidence that the existing buildings have evolved from buildings already in place more than a century ago, and the use of the property has evolved from a fish market at the river’s edge dating from the late nineteenth century. The buildings that
exist today show evidence of having been patched and repaired—some with salvaged local materials, others with vinyl siding and various new building materials. Arranged in an “L-shape” along the waterfront, the buildings fronting the water are sited on piers and feature exterior wooden decks, walkways, and docks; there is also a boat ramp. Overall, the buildings are of frame construction, generally one-story in height with side or front gable roofs, wood or vinyl windows, and contain one or two multi-purpose rooms.

Known also as simply “the camps” or “shanties,” the property is a rare surviving collection of vernacular buildings, which represent a time when sturgeon and shad were abundant in the Hudson River, and people made their livelihoods fishing the river and selling their catch on the shore. These people, commonly called “Furgarians” today, formed a community where the buildings were handed down generation-to-generation. The period of significance for “The Shacks” is ca. 1880 through ca. 1960, which reflects the peaks of the shad fishing (see the graph below). This includes the initial occupation and mid-twentieth century rebuilding/expansion.

**Historic Context**

Nineteenth and twentieth century fishing and hunting along the Hudson River for small scale commercial operations and personal subsistence or recreation are largely undocumented activities in terms of history and the material record of archaeology and architecture. Buildings such as fishing shacks and storage for small watercraft, and structures like duck blinds and net drying racks were often located on isolated river banks, accessible only by boat. Sites that survived into the twenty-first century tend to be in what might be perceived as marginal environments. For example, in the case of the Furgary Boat Club in Hudson the site is adjacent to a wastewater treatment plant on public land. A similar fishing shanty existed adjacent to a wastewater treatment plant and industrial ruins in Poughkeepsie until increasing riverfront real estate values led to the redevelopment of the site with upscale restaurants, a marina, and other facilities.

The buildings, structures, boats, and other fishing equipment are part of the maritime cultural landscape of the Hudson River. They are also the tangible remains of a traditional way of life that is rapidly disappearing, as habitat loss, pollution, over-harvesting, and other causes have nearly ended commercial and recreational fishing here. For example, today all non-migratory fish and crabs in the estuarine portion of the Hudson River (New York Harbor to Troy) are off-limits for women of childbearing age and children under 15 due to pollution, and shad fishing in New York waters has been banned since 2010 due to stock depletion.

Shad is among the most important fish species of the Hudson River, valued for both its meat and roe. Adult shad live in salt water, but return to the freshwater streams from which they hatched in order to spawn. Shad return each year to the Hudson River, typically starting in early April for roughly two months, to spawn in the sandbars north of Kingston. In the past, shad could be taken by the hundreds during this spring run, so that by the mid-nineteenth century the shad’s arrival had become a major annual event, as described by Benjamin Lossing (1868:144-145):

> It was in blossoming May, in 1860, when the shad fishers were in their glory, drawing full nets of treasure from the river in quick succession, when the "tide served," that I visited this portion of the Hudson. On both sides of the river they were pursuing their vocation with assiduity, for "the season" lasts only about two months. The immense reels on which they stretch and dry their nets, the rough, uncouth costume of the fishermen, appropriate to the water and the slime, the groups of young people who gather upon the beach to see the "catch," form interesting and sometimes picturesque foregrounds to every view on these shores. The shad is the most important fish of the Hudson, being very delicious as food, and caught in such immense numbers, as to make them cheap dishes for the poor man’s table.
By the early twentieth century, however, shad fishing on the Hudson River was in decline. Dredging for ship channels on the approach to Albany impacted spawning grounds, and in other areas, riverfront development projects such as the Palisades Interstate Park (opened 1909) resulted in the removal of fishing shanties. This decline in fishing was reversed during the Great Depression, when economic necessity led to the rebirth of shad fishing for subsistence, which in turn led to rebuilding shanties along the river’s banks. The commercial shad fishery regained importance during World War II (Of Time and Tides 2008), peaked in the late 1940s, and experienced major declines after the 1950s (Hattala 1997).

It is likely that shad fishing was the major economic activity at the earliest incarnation of the Furgary Boat Club dating to the second half of the nineteenth century, though other seasonal and year-round fishing (sturgeon, bass, eel, crab) and hunting (muskrat, deer) were also carried out.

Fishing station near Coxsackie, from Lossing (1868, page 145).

THE CATCH of Hudson River Shad from 1880 to 1995 shows the effects of over-harvesting—long cycles of boom and bust. The gaps indicate periods of no data. (from Hattala 1997:10)
Sources

The Hudson, from the Wilderness to the Sea by Benson J. Lossing, Virtue and Yorston, New York, 1868.

Of Time and Tides, Palisades Interstate Park Commission Cliff Notes, May 2008 (http://www.njpalisades.org/timesTides.html).

Managing Hudson River American Shad: A Biologist's Perspectives on the Shad's Ups and Downs by Kathryn A. Hattala, Shad Journal 2, 3 (Summer 1997).

Photographs

Photo 1 - “The Shacks” ca. 1962 (courtesy of Timothy O'Connor)
Photo 2 - "The Shacks", facing east from the railroad tracks [10-24-2014]

Photo 3 - "The Shacks" [10-24-2014]