

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 Property

Historic name: M. M. Rhodes & Sons Co.

Other names/site number: MHC # TAU258

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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

### 2. Location

Street & number: 12 Porter Street

City or town: Taunton State: Massachusetts County: Bristol

Not For Publication:  Vicinity: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  X  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X  A \_\_\_ B  X  C \_\_\_ D

<p>_____  <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b></p>	<p>_____  <b>Date</b></p>
<p>_____  <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	
<p>_____  <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b></p>	<p>_____  <b>Date</b></p>
<p>_____  <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	

M. M. Rhodes & Sons Co.

Bristol, Massachusetts

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

\_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

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

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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

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>7</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>7</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/ manufacturing facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/ manufacturing facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

OTHER: Mid to Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Factory Buildings

OTHER: Mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century Factory Buildings

### Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property:

FOUNDATION: Stone; Brick; Concrete

WALLS: Brick; Weatherboard

ROOF: Asphalt; Rubber membrane

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### Summary Paragraph

M.M. Rhodes & Sons Co. is a small complex of seven manufacturing buildings built at various times from ca. 1865 to 1960, tightly grouped on a 1.9 acre polygonal lot in the city of Taunton, Massachusetts (Figures 1-4). The buildings range from one to three stories in height and are of brick bearing wall, wood frame and metal frame construction, with gable, flat and clerestory roofs. All of the buildings are in essentially unaltered condition and with minor exceptions, retain their original exterior and interior design and materials of construction.

### Narrative Description

The M. M. Rhodes & Sons Co. manufacturing complex consists of the following buildings (see Figure 3, Building Sketch & Key to Photos). They are described below in chronological order starting with the oldest.

#### A. PAINT SHOP (c.1865)

Contributing Building

Exterior: This 1.5 story wood frame structure (Photos 1-5) is the oldest of the Rhodes buildings. The main portion of the structure which runs parallel to Porter Street is 62 feet by 44 feet (Photos 1-2; Figures 3, 5-9). Physical evidence indicates the main building building has been added-to five times between 1865 and 1922.<sup>1</sup> The main building appears to have been built in two sections, with the east half built between 1865 and 1875 and the west west half built between 1881 and 1888. The roof of each section is gabled, with two rectangular cupolas on the ridge line. The two gable roofs are bridged by a flat-roof section supporting a central cupola in the center (Photos 1-5; Figures 5-8). Each gable roof has two rectangular cupolas with windows, for

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<sup>1</sup> Marc N. Belanger, industrial historian and president of the Southern New England Chapter of the Society of Industrial Archeology, presents the probable construction history of the complex in *Shoe Buttons, Liberty Laces & Insulated Staples: 153 years of M.M. Rhodes & Sons Company, Taunton, Mass.*, published by author, 2015.

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light and ventilation (Photos 3-4; Figures 5-6). Each of the four gabled cupolas is 9'-4" by 3'-8" running lengthwise along the ridge. The cupolas on one ridge are parallel to those on the other. Each cupola has three 6-light sashes along the eave sides. The sash are hinged and operated by rope and pulley from below to allow ventilation in the summer months. The central cupola is 6'-8" square with two 6-light sash on each side, also operable by rope from below. There are two sky lights, one on each roof slope (Photos 3-4). A complex two-way system of trusses supports the roof, with two 8-inch square posts in the middle (Photo 25; Figures 5-8).

The building retains most of the original clapboards and 6/6 windows. Frame and brick additions dating to the late 19th and early 20th century extend off the north and south ends and the rear (further described below). There are four chimneys in the structure that vent four banks of steam-heated drying ovens (Photos 3-5). The location of the three interior chimneys is shown on Figure 7. The fourth is an exterior chimney on the back wall serving the bank of ovens shown on Figure 7 as "Large Oven #2." The chimney is not shown on Figure 7 but is visible as the left-most chimney in Photo 3.

Interior: The interior of the Paint Shop (Building A) is an open space with the oven banks taking up much of the room (Photos 23-24; Figures 7-8). The large ovens were fitted with a specialized rail system for loading product (Photo 23; Figure 9). The floor is paved with brick.

Additions: Additions were made to sides and rear of the Paint Shop (Building A) during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century according to the owners. The sequence and dates of their construction is not known. The North Addition (Photos 6 and 7) is one-story with a low-pitch gable roof and original clapboard siding. There are three original 6/6 wood windows on each of the three exposed sides. A solid plank pedestrian door is located on the gable end. The interior walls and floor are brick and there are two metal-clad wood fire doors inside separating the addition from the main Paint Shop (see Figure 7).

The Rear Addition is 48 feet by 8 feet, visible on left in Photo 3, from above in Photo 10 and shown on Figures 7 and 8 as "Part of Addition" and "Large Oven # 2." Its low-pitched gable roof is tied into the Engine/Blacksmith & Boiler House roof ("Engine House," Building C); the back wall is brick and a party wall with the Engine House. A wide wood service door with eight lights is set in an arched opening on the north wall (Photo 10). To the left of it is a narrower metal-clad wood door leading into the Engine House. Both doors are shown in Figures 7 and 8. The floor is brick.

The South Addition (Photo 5) is brick, 18 feet by 38 feet, with a low-slope shed-roof tied into the gabled roof of the main Paint Shop (Building A). Windows are all original wood 6/6 sash in segmental arched openings on the front and rear. The openings are headed with same brick double header course arches used in the entire complex. The windows on the south side are flat-headed openings: the wood wall-plate beam that carries the rafters also serves as window headers. A single wood pedestrian door in an arched opening is located on the rear. The interior is divided into two rooms with sliding metal-clad, wood doors to separate them from the main

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Paint Shop (Figure 7). The front room (fronting Porter Street) is 15 feet by 18 feet; the back room is 23 feet by 18 feet. The floors are brick.

### B. FACTORY (1880)

### Contributing Building

The 3-story brick Factory building fronts Porter Street and is of typical fireproof mill building construction (Photos 6-9). It measures 30 by 100 feet, three bays wide by thirteen bays deep and rests on a stone foundation. The roof is slightly pitched from the longitudinal center line to the sides with an overhang of about 2 feet. A simple brick cornice projects a few inches on all four sides. Projecting from the cornice midway along the south side is the original cantilevered timber hoisting beam with integral chain-fall hoist. The hoist serves freight doors on all three floors (the doors are further described below). The original chain with forged lifting hook, passes over sheaves in the beam to wind onto a overhead wood drum originally turned by the factory line-shaft belt-drive system. The belt is now powered by electric motor, but the original reversing transmission remains in service.

Window and door openings are have segmentally arched head with a mix of soldier and row-lock (header) courses. Window sills are wood. The aforementioned freight doors on the west side the building consist of solid paneled wood doors centered under the hoist (Photo 8). The first floor door is paired with small "peep" windows apparently added later. The upper doors are single with wood safety gates placed on the outside.

The main entrance of this building is centered on the narrow end fronting Porter Street (Photo 7). It retains the original 8-foot tall raised panel double doors with original hardware, granite steps and arched transom light. Original paired 1/1 windows flank the door; all other windows in the building are original wood 6/6 double-hung sash as are most other windows in the complex. All other entry doors are original; in fact, nearly every original feature of the building, inside and out, remains unaltered and in some cases with original finish.

The interior of the Factory consists of an Office area just inside the front entry with the remainder of the first floor and the upper floors dedicated to manufacturing machinery and production related uses. The Office, a complex of four rooms, features a decorative tin ceiling, original wood paneling with original finish, interior wood window shutters, a wood gated interior waiting area and wood floors (Photo 17).

The original 1880-era iron and steel safes remain in service. The office wash room retains original fixtures including a marble-topped lavatory.

The machine areas retain all of their original fixtures, finishes and appurtenances with very few exceptions (Photos 18-21). The original ceiling-mounted line-shaft leather belt drive system extends through all three floors and was used to power production machinery until the company closed in 2014 (Photo 21). The building was originally lighted with gas and some gas lamp fixtures remain in place. Knob and tube-style electrical wiring for lighting was installed in the early 20th century and remains in place and functioning along with modern wiring added in

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some areas. Another original feature of the building is its fire suppression system which includes at least one faucet and hose in each of the production areas as well as hanging fire buckets, some of which remain in place as they have for over 130 years (Photo 20). The exposed beams have beveled edges, a finishing technique used to reduce their susceptibility to catching fire.

C. ENGINE, BLACKSMITH & BOILER HOUSE (c.1880)

Contributing Building

The Engine, Blacksmith & Boiler House (Engine House) is 1-story brick building measuring 38 feet by 50 feet located directly behind the Paint Shop and attached to it with later additions (Photos 10-11). The structure appears to have been built in three sections at various times, the details of which are uncertain. The original building was likely constructed at or about the same time as the Factory was built in 1880. The Engine House has a ridge line and before it was tied into adjoining buildings had gables at its northern and southern ends. Two roof vents are located on the ridge, visible in Photo 10 behind the chimney in foreground. Two large, square brick chimneys, roughly 50 feet tall, flank each side of the boiler room (Photo 10). The building retains all of its original wood doors and windows in arched openings. Two doors and a window are on the east side; a door and four windows are on the west side. There are no openings to the exterior on the front (west) or back (east) sides which are connected to the Paint Shop and Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop (Building F) respectively.

The interior is divided into five rooms. The original Engine Room, located at the rear of the building, has been converted to a manufacturing space. The Blacksmith Shop (Photo 22) is a narrow room along the north side of the building room that also serves as a passageway between the Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop and the Paint Shop. The present Boiler Room at the front of the building houses a gas-fired boiler that appears to date from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. There are also two small closet-size store rooms. The floors are brick and concrete.

D. NAIL CUTTING & TUMBLING SHOP (c.1893)

Contributing Building

This 2-story brick building measures 50 feet by 18 feet, five bays deep by two bays wide. It is located in the southwestern corner of the property (Photos 12-13). The nearly flat shed-roof slopes slightly from the back to the front. A hoist beam projects outward just below the front overhang of the roof. Two original freight loading doors remain centered one above the other just below the hoist. This building retains most of its original wood doors and paired 4/4 windows in arched openings. A small brick shed with one door and no windows known as the "Sawdust House," c.1895, is attached to the front building and measures 9 feet by 15 feet. It is visible in Photo 12. A metal duct to carry waste sawdust vacuumed from tumblers in the main building runs across and passes through a hole in the roof to discharge the sawdust.

E. STOREHOUSE (c.1893)

Contributing Building



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This small 1-story, five-sided brick building located on the south edge of the property (Photos 13-14). The length of the walls are 16.5', 21.5', 9.0', 12.0' and 11.0'. The flat roof has rotted and collapsed within the walls. There is one small window opening with a fixed 3-light casement sash on the northwest side and one door opening on the north side, measuring 4.0' x 6.5'. The wood paneled door is detached and fallen inside. A brick privacy wall about 20' in length and 8' high runs between the Storehouse and the Sawdust House along the property line.

F. SHIPPING/RECEIVING & MACHINE SHOP (1957)

Contributing Building

This 1-story concrete block building (Photo 15) has a low-pitch shed roof, measures 42-feet by 88-feet and connects the rear of the Factory, the Engine/Blacksmith & Boiler House and the Nail Cutting & Tumbling Shop (Photo 10). It measures 3 bays by 9 bays and retains its original doors and windows. The windows are industrial metal frame type with 8 lights with an operable 4-light pivoting sash in the center. The interior is divided into three rooms, two used for preparing and stockpiling products for shipment and one housing a variety of machinery. There is a concrete floor throughout. It was built at a cost of \$18,998

G. WAREHOUSE (1960)

Contributing Building

This 1-story prefabricated metal building measuring 60 feet by 40 feet was constructed as a warehouse (Photo 16) It has a structural steel frame, corrugated galvanized steel sheet siding and a gable roof. Commonly known as a Pruden Building and popular in the 1950s, it was manufactured by Pruden Products of Wisconsin which is now part of the Varco-Pruden Co. It has two typical wood roll-up overhead garage-style doors, both measuring 8 feet x 8 feet: a solid door is on the long side facing Porter Street; one with windows is on the gable-end facing the Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop. There are two metal frame 4-light windows on the opposite sidewall and endwall. The top two panes are an awning sash that opens for ventilation. The floor is concrete. There is electricity, but no heat in this building. It was built at a cost of \$3,844.

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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.)

Industry  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1865-1965  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1865 Paint Shop (Building A) Constructed  
1880 Factory (Building B) Constructed  
1893 Nail Cutting and Tumbling Shop (Building D) Constructed  
1957 Shipping/Receiving and Machine Shop (Building F) Constructed  
1960 Warehouse (Building G) Constructed

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Builders**

William H. Hale, Brickwork for Factory, (Building B)  
Charles A. Eldridge, Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop (Building F)  
Charles A. Eldridge, Warehouse, (Building G)

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### Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

M.M. Rhodes & Sons Co. is a small complex of industrial buildings constructed c. 1865 to 1960. The company produced specialized fastening products, including shoe buttons, tacks, nails, shoe laces and staples. The products were manufactured on machines and equipment some of which were invented, patented and built by Rhodes family members. The products made a significant impact in the shoe, furniture, electrical and communication industries in Massachusetts and elsewhere. According to M.M. Rhodes' biography published in the Massachusetts Encyclopedia of Biography, it was the first successful shoe button factory in the United States. In continual operation by six generations of the Rhodes family from 1861 to 2014, the company employed hundreds of local families and is one of the two oldest family-owned industries in Taunton, the other being Reed and Barton.

Set in a mixed-use, but increasingly residential section west of downtown Taunton, it is the last intact industrial complex in that part of the city which was a thriving manufacturing area from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Sanborn maps from 1888 and 1893 show an industrial area bounded by Oak Street, Olney Street, Wales Street, Mason Street, Cohannet Street and High Street. Within this area were located Mason Machine Works, Taunton Locomotive Works, F. S. Babbit Machine Shop, W.R. Potter Yarn Mill, Old Colony Railroad Round House and Machine Shop and M.M. Rhodes & Sons Co. among others at various times. A 19<sup>th</sup> century warehouse for Cohannet Mills Cotton Co. survives on Cohannet Street, just to the east of the Rhodes complex. The Rhodes buildings were in continual manufacturing use until the business closed in 2014. The property is therefore associated with events important to state and local industrial history and possesses the necessary historical significance for listing in the National Register under Criterion A.

This complex represents an exceedingly rare example of unaltered 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial factory architecture, complete with all original exterior and interior building features and details, including original belt-driven machinery and other directly associated original equipment, fixtures and appurtenances. The property is therefore an important example of historic building types that possess the necessary historical significance and integrity for listing in the National Register under Criterion C.

The Factory (Building B), in particular, is an extraordinarily intact representative of the fireproof industrial building property type widely built in the United States during the mid and late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The structure is long and narrow with multiple windows to provide natural lighting prior to the advent of electric lighting. The floors are wide open, not only for the better transmission of light, but for the convenient arrangement of machinery and for the installation of a central drive shaft for belt-driven machinery. This building reflects the characteristics of 19<sup>th</sup> century factory buildings described in a paper by Prof. Ljijana Jevremovc called "Aesthetics of Industrial Architecture in the Context of Industrial Buildings Conversion," published in 2012. She wrote the following:

"The germ of the industrial aesthetic is seen in the simple mill buildings from late 1700, precursors of the modern factory, were straightforward wooden or masonry buildings

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with repetitive forms and rhythmic openings...These first mills reflected building technology of their time and responded to the realities of fire and workplace safety. In the day before electricity, flooding workspace with as much daylight as possible was the most important. Long and narrow, these buildings had open and unobstructed internal spaces to accommodate as many machines and workers as possible. Their narrowness not only allowed light into their centres, but also efficiently enabled machines on both sides of the building to be powered from a single central shaft down the floor. Early industrial buildings were simple because their utilitarian nature placed them low in the social and therefore aesthetic hierarchy. From the earliest times, buildings generally reflected their social importance. While the buildings of higher reputation, such as churches, public buildings, and royal structure, the more ornament had used, the service buildings had been strictly no-frills."

The property retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and meets criteria A and C for listing on the National Register with a local level of significance.

### **Narrative Statement of Significance**

M.M. Rhodes & Sons Co. was established by Marcus Morton Rhodes in 1861 to manufacture hoop skirt trimmings, glazier points, coffin tacks, and upholstery nails made on an "old-style lining nail machine." It is believed that Rhodes first set up shop in two leased buildings on Porter Street that were formerly part of the Taunton Umbrella Company which stood on the site. Those buildings have been razed, one in 1934 and the second in 1957. Rhodes bought the property in 1865 for \$3,350.<sup>2</sup> He apparently added the manufacture of shoe buttons to his product line at this time and erected the Paint Shop (Building A) to house the equipment and drying ovens required for the process.

This business emerged from a city that generated a wide variety of industries, such as the Old Colony Iron Works in East Taunton, the Albert Field Tack Company near downtown Taunton, Cohannet Mills which made fine cotton yarns, Reed and Barton, a world famous manufacturer of silverware, and Mason Machine works which manufactured textile machinery and locomotives. According to family lore, M.M. Rhodes found a shoe button on the street and told his son Charles M. Rhodes that if he (Charles) could find the proper material to form the button, he (Marcus) would build a machine to make the button. M.M. Rhodes successfully designed and built a button-making machine and after a slow start, the button business became a mainstay of the company.

According to M.M. Rhodes' biography published in the Massachusetts Encyclopedia of Biography it was the first successful shoe button factory in the United States. The business had a weak start because France was the preferred supplier of the nation's shoe buttons, however,

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<sup>2</sup> Taunton Umbrella Co. is referenced in an 1857 mortgage deed for the property. These buildings appear on 1858 and 1922 maps, but have since been demolished

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when the supply was cut off during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, Rhodes capitalized on the opportunity and became a leading supplier of shoe buttons. It was especially important in this part of Massachusetts which had a flourishing shoe shop industry at the time according to the Rhodes biography in the Massachusetts Encyclopedia of Biography. Town reports found on the Massachusetts Historical Commission website recorded that Brockton, Plymouth, Middleboro “also shared in the prosperity of the shoe industry” which peaked around 1920.

The success that came in the 1870s led to the construction of a new 3-story brick manufacturing building (*Building B*) in 1880 to further expand production. To help protect the business, Marcus Morton Rhodes patented a shoe button machine in 1881 (U.S. Patent #244,310) based on the machine he invented several years earlier.

The shoe button business flourished until about 1892 when expanding competition slowed sales growth. By 1892 there were “six or seven” other factories producing shoe buttons and “there was no money for anyone,” according to a history of the company written by Marcus A. Rhodes in 1928. Competition came from the Morley Button Manufacturing Co. of Portsmouth, N.H., Hedge-Lewis Manufacturing Co. of New Bedford, Mass., New Bedford Button Co. of New Bedford, Mass., H.L. Cushman & Co. of Taunton, Mass. and the Standard Manufacturing Co. of Providence, R.I.

Rhodes company reports filed with the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor from 1889 to 1899 show that shoe button production topped out in 1890 when 2.4 million buttons were produced daily and 738.9 million were produced over the year. No records on production prior to 1889 have been discovered, however a history of Taunton written by Samuel Hopkins Emery put button production in the early years at as much as 6 million per day. By 1899 production had fallen to 144,000 buttons per day and 40.6 million for the year. Buttons produced in 1889 were sold for \$108,603 which equals \$2.8 million in today’s dollars. By 1899 sales dropped to \$3,292 or \$92,000 in today’s dollars. During this 10-year period the greatest number of employees during any given year ranged from 25 to 49. The lowest numbers ranged from 5-18. The greatest number of employees that can be documented for the company at any time during its 153-year history occurred in 1962 when a quarterly report to the Internal Revenue Service recorded 62 employees.

In 1899, M.M. Rhodes along with its competitors went into business with Morley Button Manufacturing Co. of Portsmouth, N.H. Rhodes supplied about 15 percent of Morley's button line. In 1907 Rhodes granted a “license and lease” to the Morley Button Manufacturing Co. of Portsmouth, N.H., allowing it to use its “machines and processes” in the manufacture of shoe buttons. The lease was good until Jan. 1, 1913, however while the machines were leased to Morley, they never left the Rhodes plant in Taunton, according to company papers. The partnership was “very profitable” according the company history written by Marcus Arnold Rhodes (1928) and lasted until 1913.

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With the declining of the use of shoe buttons in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the company began to turn its attention to other kinds of fasteners with limited success. In 1918 the company began manufacturing shoe laces named "Liberty Laces" to meet the increased demand created by the military during World War I. By the time the venture got up and running the war ended and the enterprise was abandoned after only a few years. A document filed with the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census of Manufactures, in 1919 shows that the company made 4.5 million pair of shoe laces in 1919 which it sold for \$7,933 or \$107,359 in today's dollars. That amount represented about 7 percent of the company's sales that year.

The rapidly expanding use of telephones and electricity created another opportunity for Rhodes and in 1922 the company entered the telephone wire fastener business, designing and building its own machines. Around 1926 the company began making fasteners for the electrical wiring business. The manufacture of telephone and electrical wire fasteners sustained the business from that time until it closed in 2014. Customers have included AT&T, the Bell Companies, ITT, General Electric and many others. The products have been shipped all over the nation and internationally, particularly to South and Central America as well as Canada.

The manufacture of metal cable clamps started in the 1940s in the Engine, Blacksmith & Boiler House with the main customer being Western Electric. The steam engines which were housed in this building were removed and replaced with clamp and clasp presses. The clamp and clasp presses were operated continuously until the business closed in 2014..

In the 1950s, the company began the production of tack strips for the furniture industry, packaged under the W.W. Cross Co. label. The Factory (Building B) was used in the production of all these products.

The second and third floors of the Factory have been out of use for at least 40 years. The first floor was in continual use until 2014. It was used as a machine shop and to cut cable clamps and form clasps, both of which were used to hold wires or conduit. The building features an overhead belt system that extends from the first floor to the third floor which was used to power the clamp presses, tack strip presses, lathes and other machines until the business closed.

The Paint Shop was also in continuous use until the company closed in 2014. As its name implies, it was used to finish products with paint. Since 1973 insulated staples were copper-plated there as well. This building also utilized an overhead belt system to operate machines until it closed. The Paint Shop holds four banks of steam-heated drying ovens. The smaller ovens hold individually loaded trays of products; the large ovens accommodated racks of trays on trolleys that moved on a steel rails and then rolled sideways into the ovens. At some point, small 1-story wing additions of both brick and wood construction were added to the Paint Shop on the east and west ends. The west wing was used to store the track carts and other materials; the east wing housed tumblers to smooth the rough edges of various fiber-headed nails and staples. In the early days the company made its own paint. It should be noted that the structural failure of the Paint Shop roof system may call into question the architectural integrity of the building.

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In 1957, a 2-story wood building dating from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century which was part of the original cluster of buildings was torn down and replaced with the Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop, a one-story cement block building. It was attached to the Factory, Engine House and Nail Cutting & Polishing Shop, thereby interconnecting all the buildings in the complex. This structure was used until the business closed in 2014 for packing, shipping and the manufacture of insulated staples.

In 1960, the company built a free-standing "Pruden Building," to serve as a warehouse in the northeast corner of the property. The pre-fabricated metal-frame structure was manufactured by Pruden Products of Wisconsin and cost \$7,688.43.

The Rhodes family is hoping to find a developer who will be able to remake the structure into housing for what is now substantially a residential neighborhood. It is the hope of the family to preserve the history of the site while adapting it to a useful purpose.

If M.M.Rhodes & Sons Co. is approved for listing on the National Register of Historic Places it will be the seventh industrial site to be put on the list in Taunton. Five sites were added to the list in 1984: Old Colony Works-Nemasket Mills Complex; Albert Field Tack Company; Old Weir Stove Building; Whittenton Mills Complex and Reed and Barton Complex. Cohannet Mill No. 3 was added in 2006. Three of these industrial complexes, Old Colony Works-Nemasket Mills Complex, Albert Field Tack Company and Cohannet Mill No. 3 have been converted into residential-use buildings.



M. M. Rhodes & Sons Co.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Balanger, Marc. "Shoe Buttons, Liberty Laces & Insulated Staples: 153 years of M.M. Rhodes & Sons Company, Taunton, Mass." Self-published pamphlet, 2015.

Bassett, Mary Cooley. *Lineage Book*. [National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution] vol. 34. Washington, DC: Harrisburg Pub. Co., 1900.

Brookline, MA. *A History of Brookline, Massachusetts: From the First Settlement of Muddy River Until the Present Time, 1630-1906 ...* Brookline, Mass: The Brookline Press Company, 1906.

Cutter, William R. *Encyclopedia of Massachusetts, Biographical-Genealogical*. New York: American Historical Society, 1916.

Deed. Ansel Howard to William E. Camp and Elisha Jackson, August 24, 1853, Northern Bristol County Registry of Deeds, Taunton, Book 212, Page 227. Mentions "A lot of land with dwelling house, shop and other buildings... with steam engine and main shaft now in said shop."

Deed. Horace Lewis to Marcus Morton Rhodes, July 3, 1865, Northern Bristol County Registry of Deeds, Taunton, Book 277, Page 33. Description of "a main shop" and "rear shop."

Deed. Mary E. Cook to M.M. Rhodes & Sons, May 3, 1879, Book 377, Page 182, Northern Bristol County Registry of Deeds, Taunton, Book 377, Page 182. This is the parcel of land on which the southern part of the paint shop was built.

Emery, Samuel Hopkins. *History of Taunton, Massachusetts: from its settlement to present time*. Syracuse, NY: D. Mason, 1893.

Hanna, William F. *A History of Taunton, Massachusetts*. Taunton, MA: Old Colony Historical Society, 2007.

*Hub, The*. Hub Publishing Company, New York, Vol. 15, No. 5, August 1, 1873, advertisement on p. 197. [Google books]

M.M. Rhodes & Sons. *Sample of Goods Manufactured by MM Rhodes*; 18" x 29" framed board with samples of items manufactured (c. 1865-1869).

M.M. Rhodes & Sons. *Price List of M.M. Rhodes and Sons*; circa 1870-1872. [Company records].

M.M. Rhodes & Sons. *Ledger book*. Entry for January 11, 1876; list of items sold to American Tack Company (Fairhaven).

M.M. Rhodes & Sons, Co., Board of Directors meeting minutes, January 8, 1935, "the old building known as #2 had been razed, machinery moved to building #1."

M. M. Rhodes & Sons Co.

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*New England Business Directory*, 1865, Adams, Sampson & Co., Boston, directory listings on p. 333, p. 348, p. 396, p. 412. (Google books)

Oliver, J. J., Editor. "The Indicator," vol. 35, no. 12, June 19, 1909.

Pease, Zephaniah W. *History of New Bedford*. New York: The Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1918.

Rhodes, Marcus A. "Letter to Frederick B. Wills, Esq., Auburn, N.Y. Jan, 19, 1928." Typed manuscript, 6 pp., providing narrative history of the M.M. Rhodes and Sons Co.

Sanborn Map & Publishing Company. *Taunton, Massachusetts*. New York: Sanborn Map & Publishing Company, 1888, 1893, 1898, 1937, 1950.

*Shoe and Leather Reporter, The*, Volume 27, 1879, advertisement on p. 126, 397 and 932. (Google books)

Taunton Daily Gazette, February 12, 1880; article mentioning construction of 3-story brick building.

Walker, George H. & Co., *Atlas of Taunton*, Boston, 1881.

Walling, H.F. *Map of the Village of Taunton, Bristol County, Massachusetts*. Philadelphia, 1858.

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):**           MHC # TAU258

M. M. Rhodes & Sons Co.

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property** approximately 1.92 acres

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on *Figure 2: Property Map with Tax Parcel Overlay.*)

A. Zone: 19	Easting: 325926	Northing: 4640690
B. Zone: 19	Easting: 325950	Northing: 4640643
C. Zone: 19	Easting: 325901	Northing: 4640579
D. Zone: 19	Easting: 325878	Northing: 4640593
E. Zone: 19	Easting: 325870	Northing: 4640577
F. Zone: 19	Easting: 325847	Northing: 4640593

### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary includes the entire area of the following Taunton property parcels: 65-208, 65-209, 65-219, 65-22, 65-221. See *Figure 2: Property Map with Tax Parcel Overlay* for graphic depiction of District Boundary.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the entire lots historically associated with the M.M. Rhodes & Sons Co. property.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title:

Rhodes, George, subject property owner; Casella, Richard, Architectural Historian; Belanger, Marc, Industrial Historian.

organization: Historic Documentation Company, Inc.

street & number: 490 Water Street

city or town: Portsmouth state: RI zip code: 02871

e-mail: rcasella@HistoricDoc.com

telephone: 401-683-3483

date: February 1, 2016

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FIGURE 1: Topographic Location Map (source: Taunton MA 7.5 X 15 min. quadrangle 1987).



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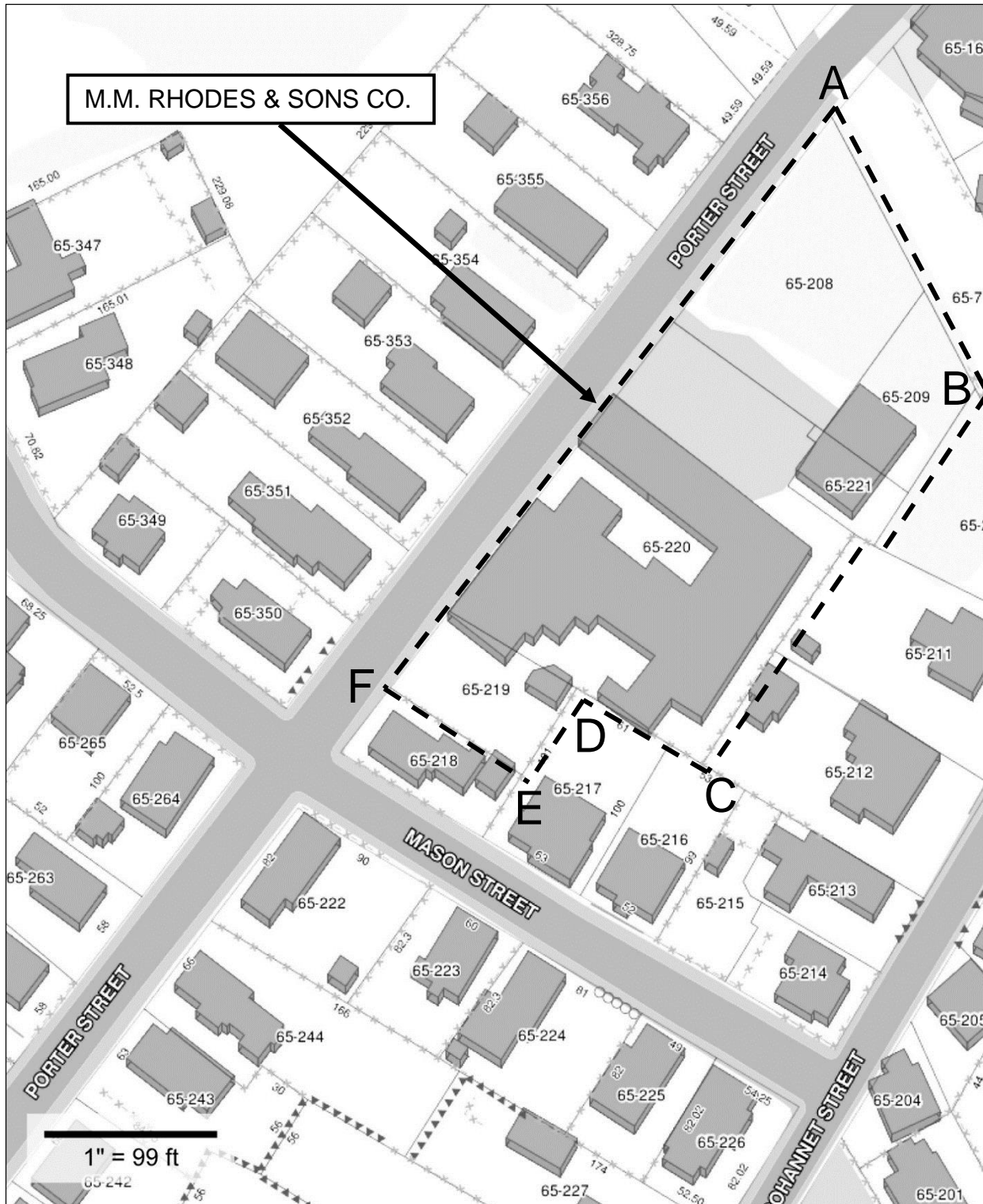


FIGURE 2: Property Map with Tax Parcel Overlay. Letters A-F refer to UTM boundary coordinates in Section 10 (source: OLIVER: MassGIS Online Mapping).

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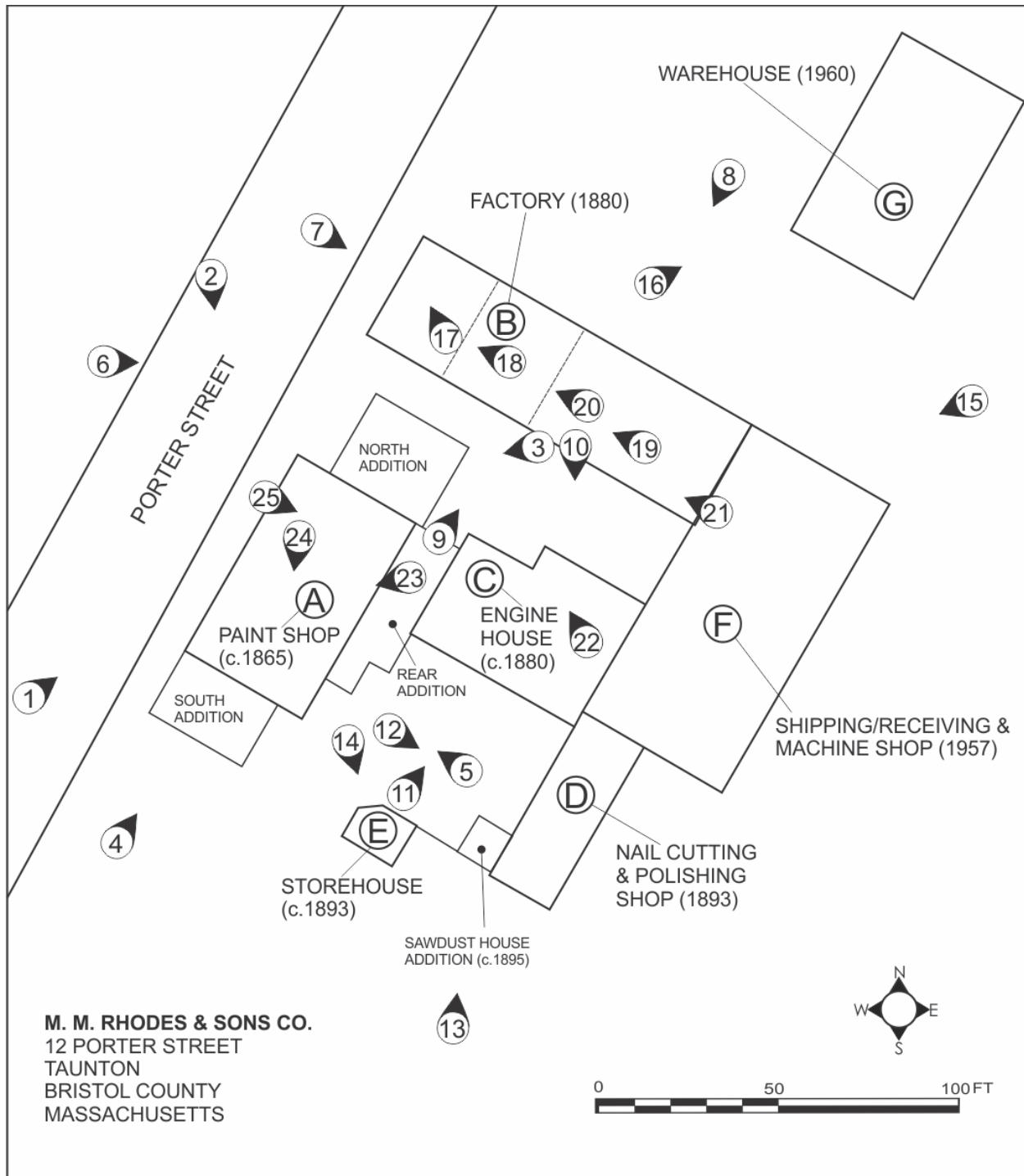


FIGURE 3: Building Sketch & Key to Photos. Letters refer to building descriptions in Section 7.

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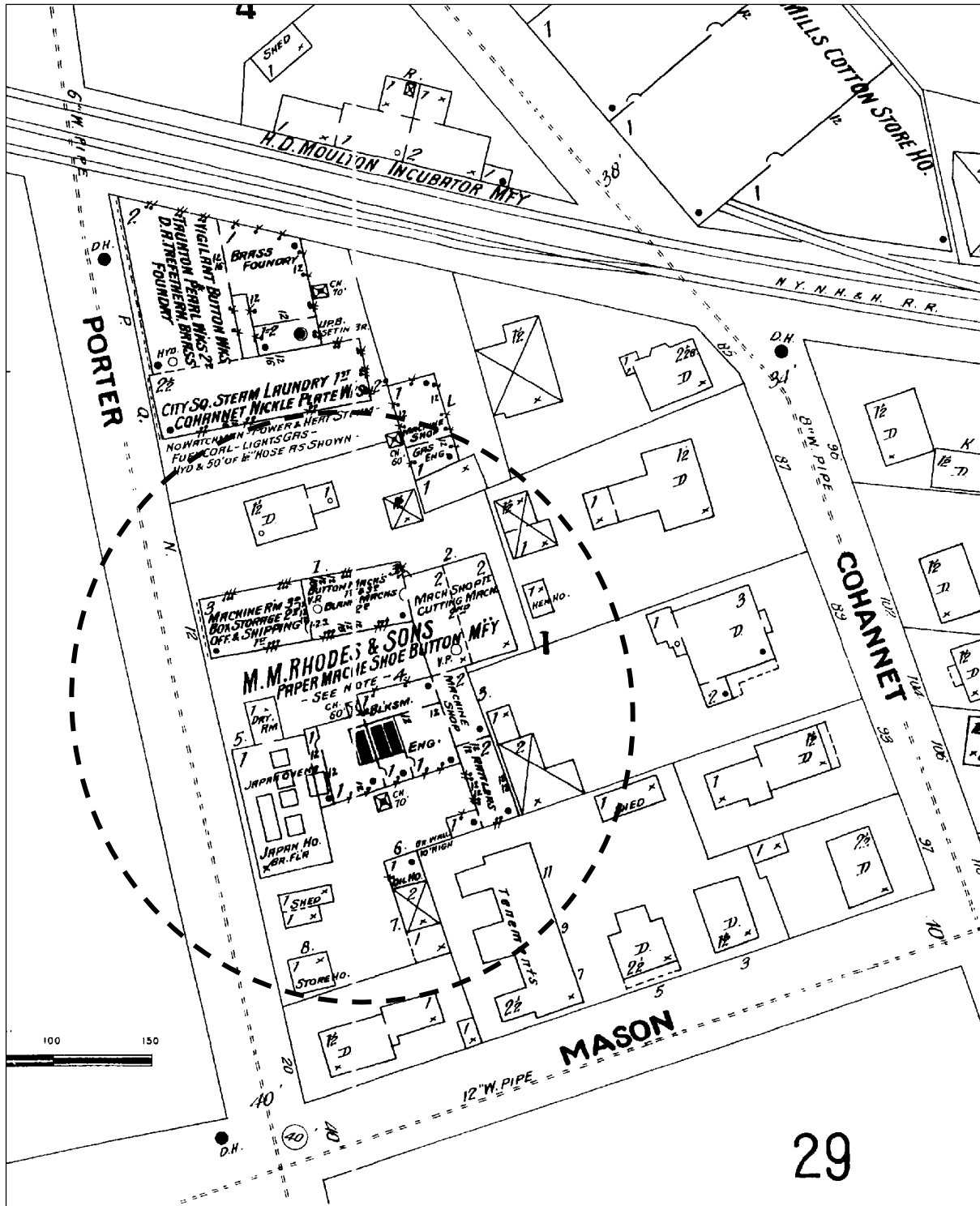


FIGURE 4: Sanborn Insurance Map, Taunton, MA, 1898.

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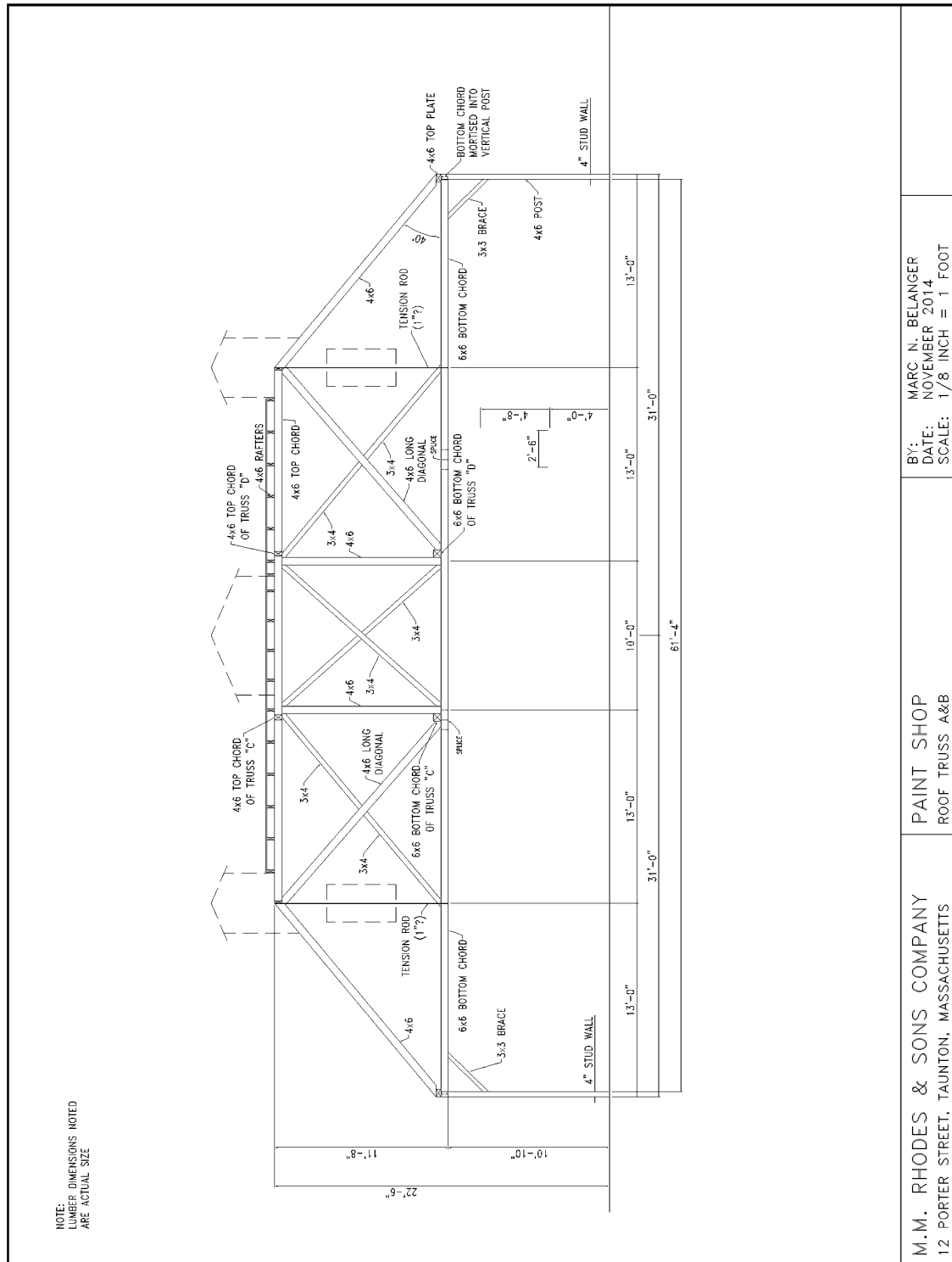


FIGURE 5: Measured Drawing. Paint Shop Roof Framing, Truss A & B.

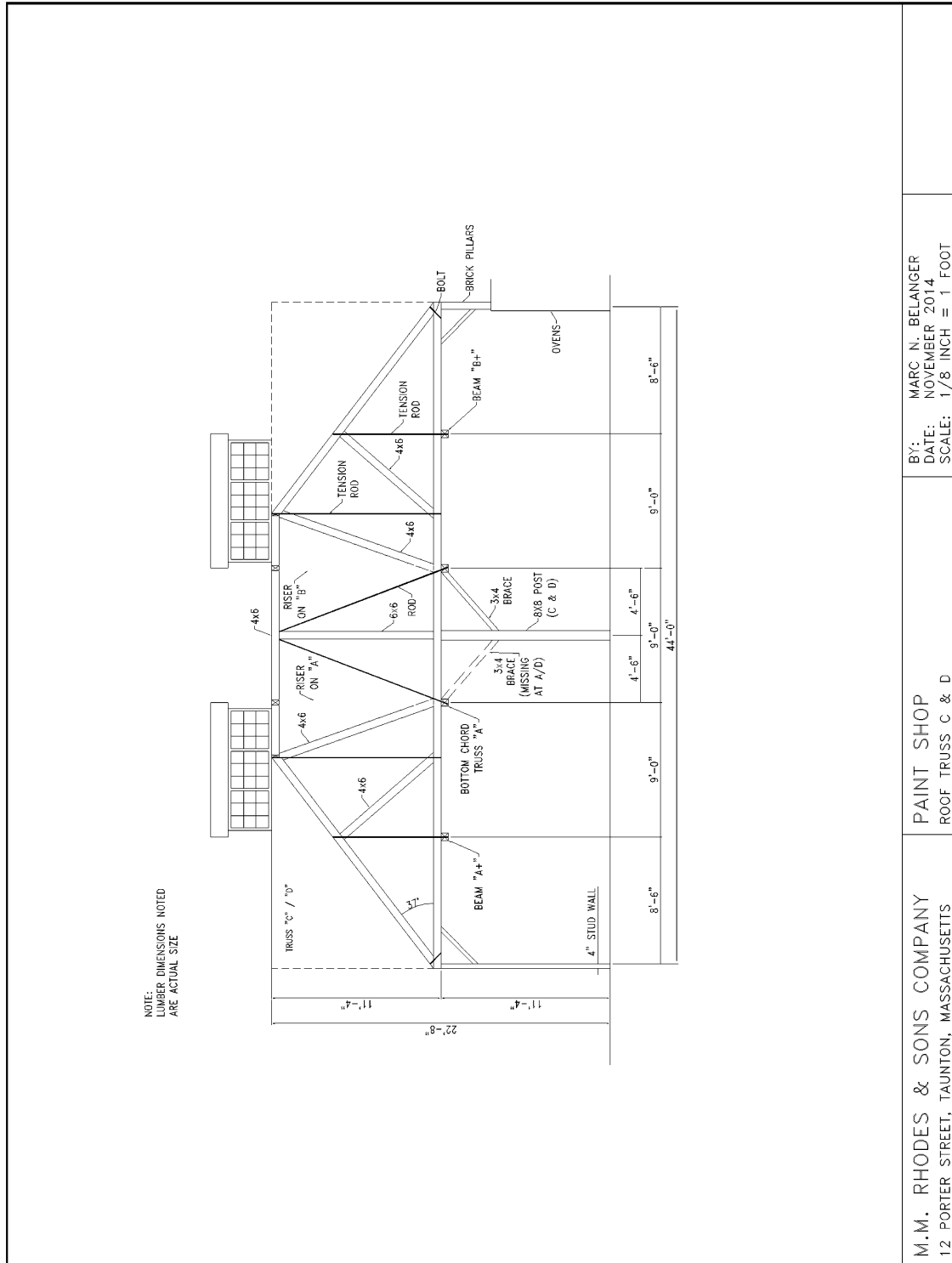


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BY: MARC N. BELANGER  
 DATE: NOVEMBER 2014  
 SCALE: 1/8" INCH = 1 FOOT

PAIN SHOP  
 ROOF TRUSS C & D

M.M. RHODES & SONS COMPANY  
 12 PORTER STREET, TAUNTON, MASSACHUSETTS

FIGURE 6: Measured Drawing. Paint Shop Roof Framing, Truss C & D.

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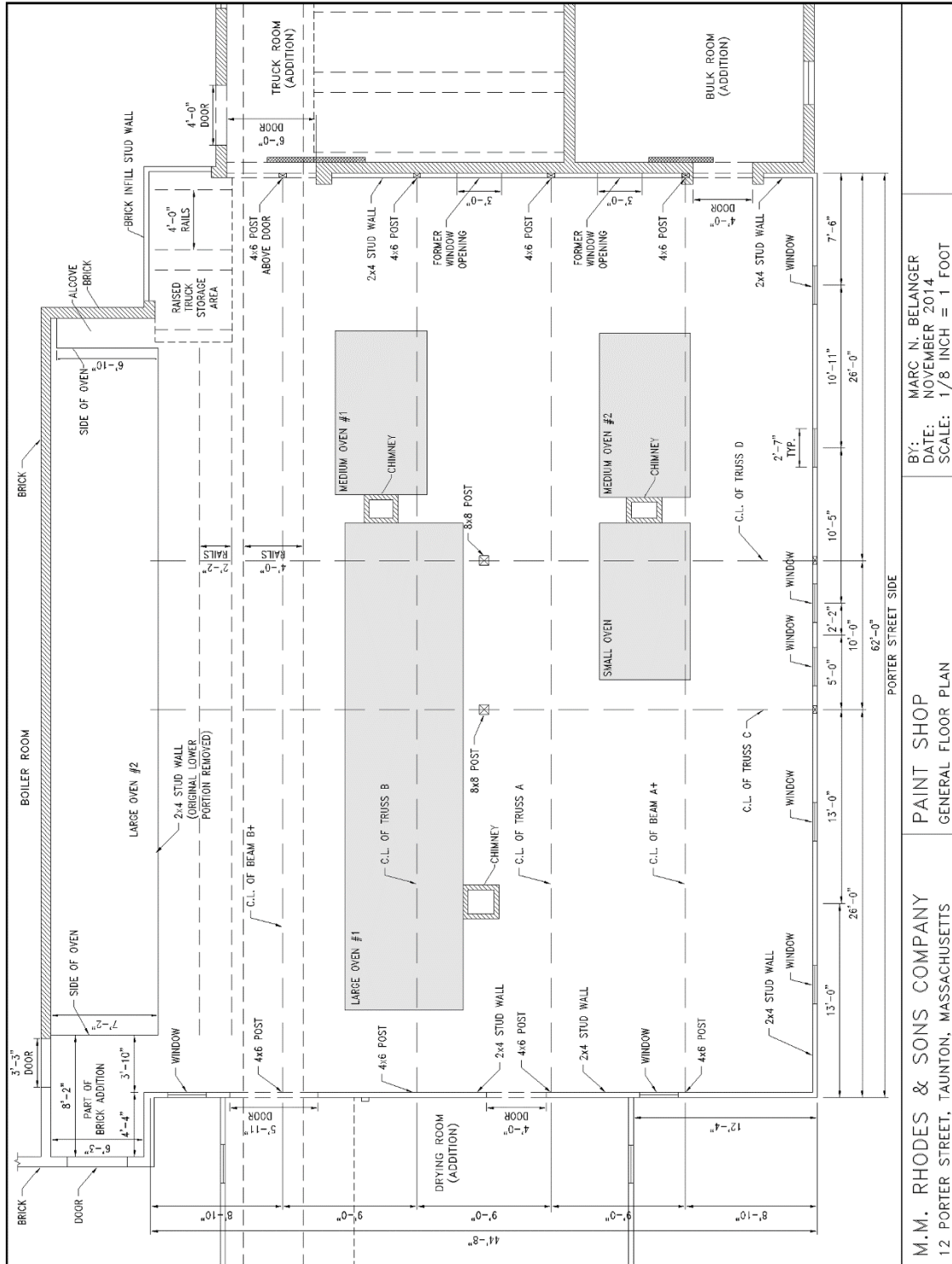


FIGURE 7: Measured Drawing. Paint Shop General Floor Plan.

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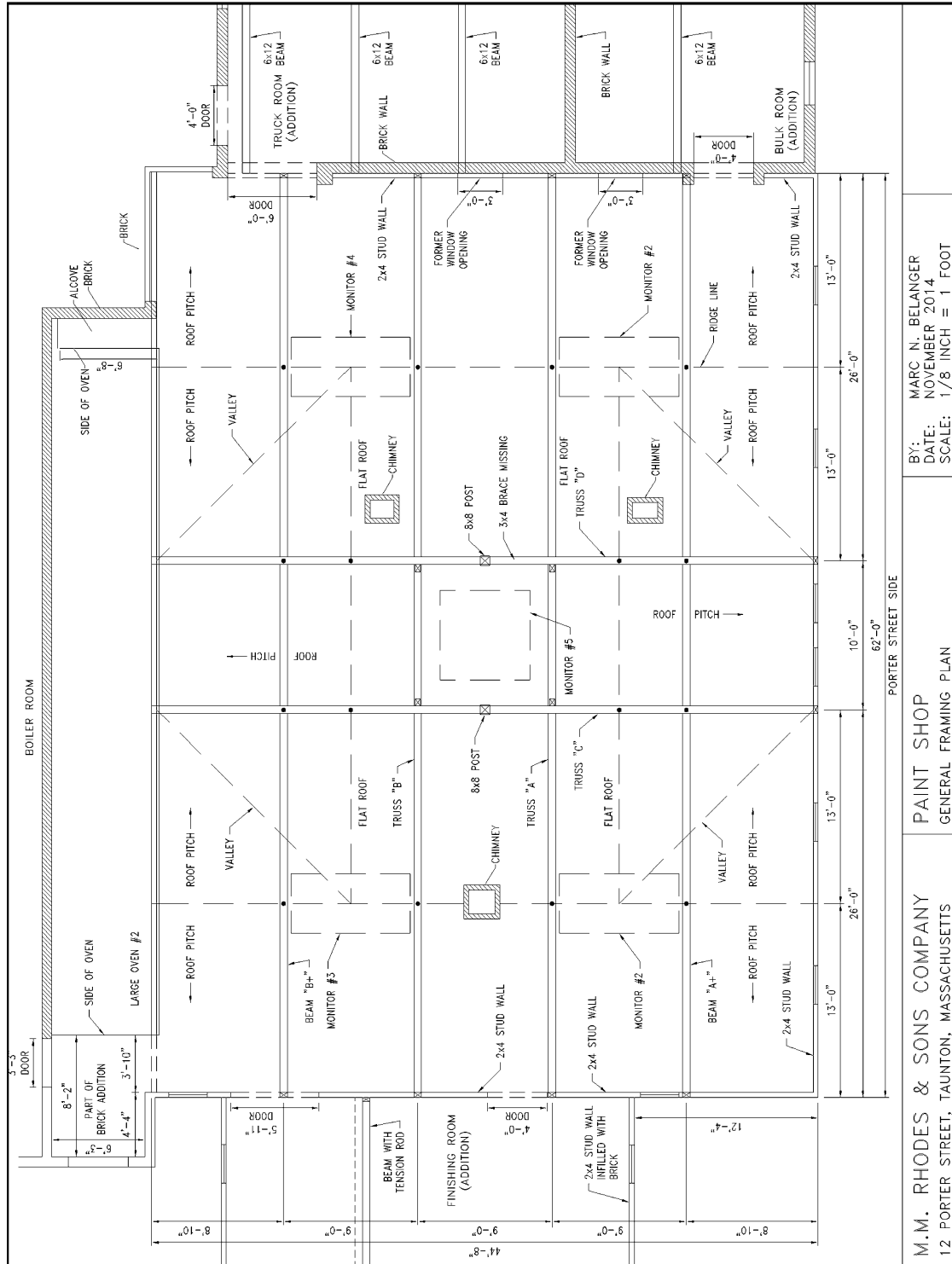


FIGURE 8: Measured Drawing. Paint Shop General Framing Plan.

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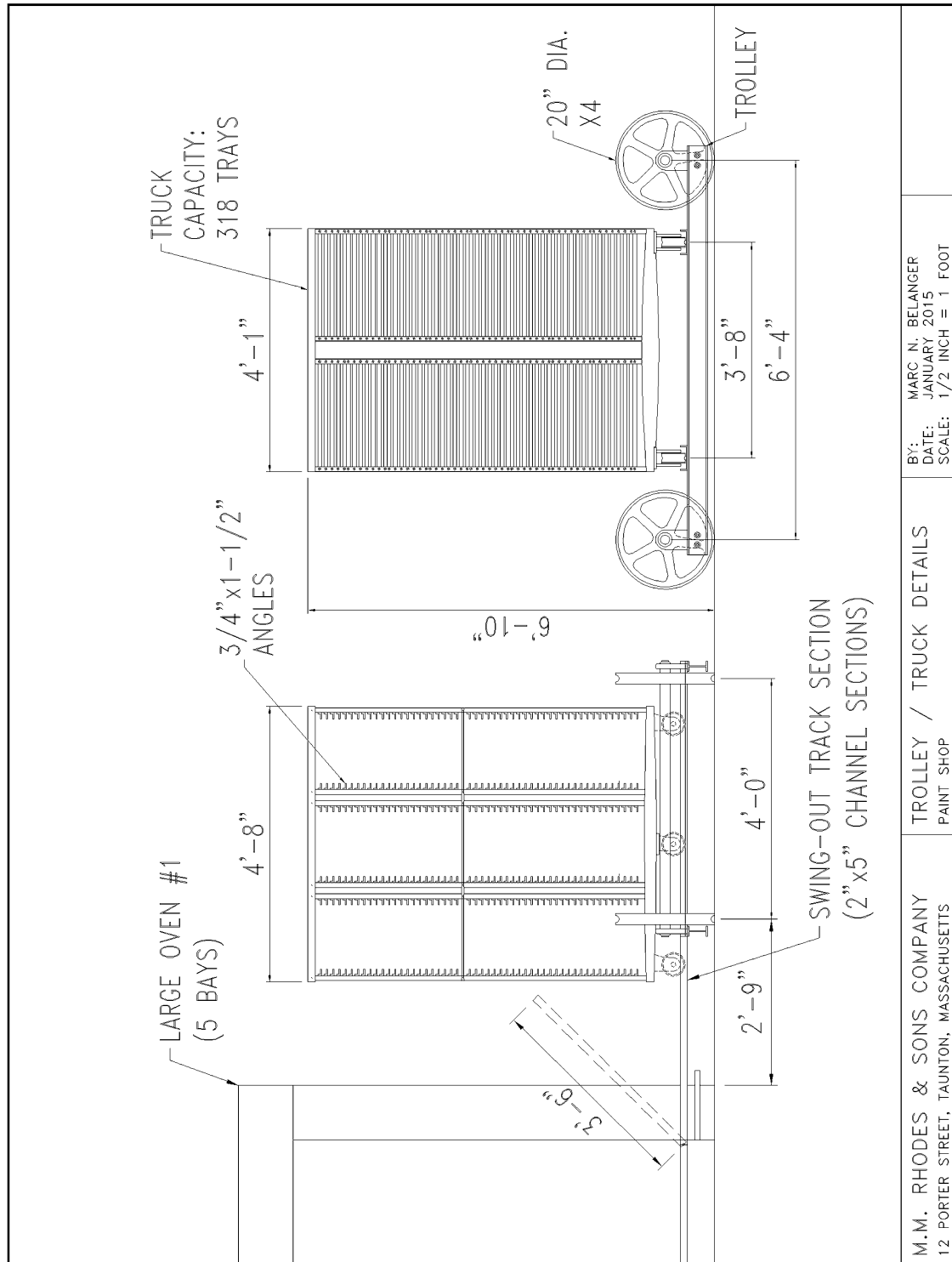


FIGURE 9: Measured Drawing. Paint Shop Equipment; Drying Oven Racks & track-mounted Trolley.

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**DATA TABLE**

<b>MACRIS #</b>	<b>BUILDING NAME</b>	<b>PHOTO #</b>	<b>YEAR</b>	<b>STYLE</b>	<b>TYPE</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
TAU.258	Paint Shop	1-5, 23-25	c.1865	Utilitarian	Building	C
TAU.258	Factory	6-9, 17-21	1880	Utilitarian	Building	C
TAU.258	Engine House	10-11, 22	c.1880	Utilitarian	Building	C
TAU.258	Nail Cutting & Polishing Shop	12-13	c.1893	Utilitarian	Building	C
TAU.258	Storehouse	13-14	c.1893	Utilitarian	Building	C
TAU.258	Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop	15	1957	Utilitarian	Building	C
TAU.258	Warehouse	16	1960	Utilitarian	Building	C

M. M. Rhodes & Sons Co.

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## PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

### All Photographs:

Name of Property: **M. M. Rhodes & Sons Co.**  
City or Vicinity: **Taunton,**  
County: **Bristol County, MA**  
Photographer: **Richard M. Casella**  
Date Photographed: **April 19, May 10, June 21, 2014; January 26, 2016**

### List of Photographs

<u>Digital File Prefix</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Description</u>
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0001		Entire complex view fronting Porter Street (west elevations), showing Paint Shop (c.1850) center and Factory (1880) at left in distance. Looking NE.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0002		Paint Shop (c.1850), west (Porter Street) and north elevations. Looking S.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0003		Paint Shop, north and east elevations showing North Addition of frame construction. Looking W.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0004		Paint Shop, south elevation, showing South Addition of brick construction. Looking NE.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0005		Paint Shop, rear elevation. Looking W.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0006		Factory (1880), West (Porter St.) and south elevations. Looking E.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0007		Factory, showing detail of fully original front entry, windows and brickwork. Looking SE.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0008		Factory, north elevation. Looking SW.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0009		Factory, south elevation. Looking NE.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0010		Engine House (c.1880) center, north elevation, attached to Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop, left, and Paint Shop, right, from 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor of Factory. Looking S.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0011		Engine House (c.1880) south elevation, showing attachment to Nail Cutting and Polishing Shop at right. Looking NE.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0012		Nail Cutting and Polishing Shop (1893), west elevation. Sawdust House shown added to front, at right. Looking SE.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0013		Nail Cutting and Polishing Shop (1893) at right; Sawdust House, center, Storehouse, left. South elevations viewed from adjacent property. Looking N.

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## PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION: List of Photographs continued

MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0014	Storehouse (c.1893), west and north elevations. Looking SE.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0015	Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop (1957), attached to rear of Factory, north and east elevations. Looking W.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0016	Warehouse (1960), west and south elevations. Looking NE.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0017	Factory, interior, Office, showing fully original interior finish. Looking N.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0018	Factory, interior, Shipping Room, showing fully original finish, paint, clerk desk and time clock. Looking W.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0019	Factory, interior, Button Machine Shop, showing original finish, equipment, and appurtenances. Looking W.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0020	Factory, interior, Button Machine Shop, close-up detail of Photo 14, showing original rules, notices and water bucket fire extinguisher. Looking W.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0021	Factory, interior, Button Machine Shop, showing original overhead line shafts and belt driven machinery. Looking W
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0022	Engine House, interior, Blacksmith Shop, showing original Forge, tools and workbenches. Present and labeled "Blaksm." (Blacksmith) on 1898 Sanborn map. Looking NE.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0023	Paint Shop, interior, Drying Ovens, showing custom designed trolley and unitized drying racks. Present and labeled "Japan Ovens" on 1898 Sanborn map. Looking E.
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0024	Paint Shop, interior, showing another type of Drying Oven. Present and labeled "Japan Ovens" on 1898 Sanborn map. Looking S
MA_Taunton_BristolCo_MMRhodes&SonsCo_0025	Paint Shop, interior, showing roof trusses and overhead line shaft belt drive system driving drum painting tumblers and other machines. Looking E

**Paperwork Reduction Act 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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

M. M. Rhodes & Sons Co.

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Photo No. 1: Entire complex view fronting Porter Street (west elevations), showing Paint Shop (c.1850) center and Factory (1880) at left in distance. Looking NE.



Photo No. 2: Paint Shop (c.1850), west (Porter Street) and north elevations. Looking S.



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Photo No. 3: Paint Shop, north and east elevations showing North Addition of frame construction. Looking W.



Photo No. 4: Paint Shop, south elevation, showing South Addition of brick construction. Looking NE.



Photo No. 5: Paint Shop, rear elevation. Looking W.



Photo No. 6: Factory (1880), West (Porter St.) and south elevations. Looking E.



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Photo No. 7: Factory, showing detail of fully original front entry, windows and brickwork. Looking SE.



Photo No. 8: Factory, north elevation. Looking SW.





Photo No. 9: Factory, south elevation. Looking NE.



Photo No. 10: Engine House (c.1880) center, north elevation, attached to Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop, left, and Paint Shop, right, from 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Factory. Looking S.



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Photo No. 11: Engine House (c.1880) south elevation, showing attachment to Nail Cutting and Polishing Shop at right. Looking NE.



Photo No. 12: Nail Cutting and Polishing Shop (1893), west elevation. Sawdust House shown added to front, at right. Looking SE.





Photo No. 13: Nail Cutting and Polishing Shop (1893) at right; Sawdust House, center, Storehouse, left. South elevations viewed from adjacent property. Looking N.



Photo No. 14: Storehouse (c.1893), west and north elevations. Looking SE.



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Photo No. 15: Shipping/Receiving & Machine Shop (1957), attached to rear of Factory, north and east elevations. Looking W.



Photo No. 16: Warehouse (1960), west and south elevations. Looking NE.





Photo No. 17: Factory, interior, Office, showing fully original interior finish. Looking N.

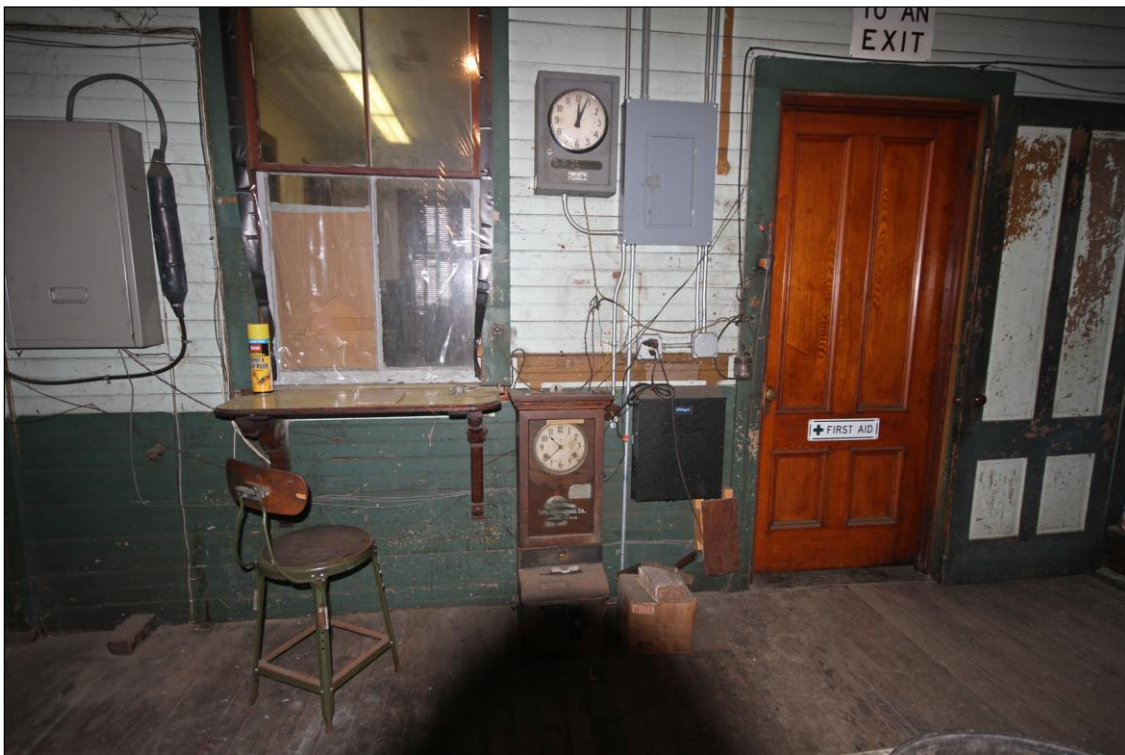


Photo No. 18: Factory, interior, Shipping Room, showing fully original finish, paint, clerk desk and time clock. Looking W.





Photo No. 19: Factory, interior, Button Machine Shop, showing original finish, equipment, and appurtenances. Looking W.



Photo No. 20: Factory, interior, Button Machine Shop, close-up detail of Photo 14, showing original rules, notices and water bucket fire extinguisher. Looking W.





Photo No. 21: Factory, interior, Button Machine Shop, showing original overhead line shafts and belt driven machinery. Looking W.



Photo No. 22: Engine House, interior, Blacksmith Shop, showing original Forge, tools and workbenches. Present and labeled "Blaksm." (Blacksmith) on 1898 Sanborn map. Looking NE.





Photo No. 23: Paint Shop, interior, Drying Ovens, showing custom designed trolley and unitized drying racks. Present and labeled "Japan Ovens" on 1898 Sanborn map. Looking E.



Photo No. 24: Paint Shop, interior, showing another type of Drying Oven. Present and labeled "Japan Ovens" on 1898 Sanborn map. Looking S.



Photo No. 25: Paint Shop, interior, showing roof trusses and overhead line shaft belt drive system driving drum painting tumblers and other machines. Looking E.