

VLR 6/12/02
NRHP 9/14/02

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 10-90)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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 processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Medical Arts Building
other names/site number (121-0223)

2. Location

street & number 2901 West Avenue not for publication
N/A
city or town Newport News vicinity X
state Virginia code VA county _____ code 700 Zip 23607

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide X locally. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 _____ 7/24/02
Signature of certifying official Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service 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. Date of Action
____ determined not eligible for the National Register
____ removed from the National Register
____ other (explain): _____ Signature of Keeper

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals-Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

roof Synthetic/Rubber

walls Brick

other _____

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

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 a 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance 1928

Significant Dates 1928

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Charles M. Robinson

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

1 18 372330 4093380

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: Ashley M. Neville and Sarah Meacham

Organization: Gray & Pape, Inc. date 2/28/02

street & number: 1705 East Main Street telephone 804-644-0656

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23223

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Dustin Mills, Medical Arts Senior Apartments Limited Partnership

street & number 11 South 12th Street, Suite 401 telephone 804-343-1600

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

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. 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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Medical Arts Building
Newport News, Virginia

Section 7 Page 1

Summary Description:

The Medical Arts Building, constructed in 1928, is a four-story, rectangular-shaped, red brick building prominently located on the corner of West Avenue and 29th Avenue about a block from the James River. It towers over most of the adjacent buildings including the neighboring public library designed by the same architect, Charles M. Robinson. Originally, this area was residential and included many of the finest homes in Newport News. Unfortunately, most of these historic structures have been demolished and today the area is a mix of historic and modern buildings and vacant lots. To the rear of the Medical Arts Building are several 1920s to 1950s apartment buildings with remnant historic residences and churches across West Avenue. A modern apartment building and its parking lot stands to the south while Newport News Ship Building and Drydock is located only three blocks north of the Medical Arts Building.

Architectural Analysis

The Medical Arts Building, constructed in 1928, is a four-story, rectangular-shaped, red brick building prominently located on the corner of West Street and 29th Avenue. Built in an urban setting, there is little open land around the building. The area immediately in front of the building is paved with concrete to the city sidewalk. There is a small lot on each side. The area between the Medical Arts Building and the library is a grass lawn, while on the opposite (south) side, the lot is a combination of grass and bare ground. There is a sidewalk and driveway across the rear of the building.

The classically inspired building is nine bays wide by ten bays deep with red brick above light colored stone on the first floor façade. Both the front and rear elevations have a slightly projecting, three-bay, center section with a double window in the center. There is a raised brick beltcourse between the third and fourth floors. A heavy galvanized metal, denticulated cornice crowns the entire building with a denticulated pediment over the projecting center section. A tall, brick, parapet wall topped by cast concrete crowns the building and hides the flat roof. All windows are six-over-six light double-hung sash and have splayed brick jackarches with stone keystones and sills. A four-story, metal fire escape is located on the south side of the building.

The most decorative features of the building are found on the first floor of the façade. A traceried fanlight tops the double entrance doors. Niches, topped with keystones and surmounted

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by festoons, flank the entry. Pilasters support the entablature with the incised name Medical Arts Building. A shallow denticulated cornice crowns the entire composition and carries a cast iron balustrade or false balcony. Decorative light fixtures are mounted on the pilasters flanking the entry.

Storefronts flank the highly decorative entrance. The north storefront appears to be early, if not original, to the building. It features a central glass and aluminum door flanked by large, single-pane windows. This is topped by a series of arches with a backing subdivided into squares. The south storefront has lost its historic elements and consists of the same window and door configuration with a plain wood and glass transom the width of the storefront.

The impressive entry provides access through a vestibule into a narrow lobby. The lobby walls have a series of windows that originally provided visibility into the commercial establishments on either side of the lobby. The lobby floor is terrazzo in a black and white diamond-shaped pattern with a black border around the edge. The vestibule floor has decorative polygonal-shaped tiles in shades of tan surrounded by a border of rectangular and square tiles. At the far end of the lobby is the elevator and stair. The elevator is a small, attendant-operated Otis elevator that is original to the building. The enclosed stairway wraps around the elevator on all floors. It features a closed stringer, paneled metal newel, and metal balusters topped with a molded wood handrail on the first floor.

There were two major rooms on the first floor each with their own storefront entrance as well as a lobby entrance. One side housed an optical company while the other, a pharmacy.

The second, third and fourth floors are a veritable maze of small offices, waiting rooms, and interior corridors with a utilitarian, almost spartan, appearance. The public corridors on each floor are the same, however. At the elevator on each floor, a corridor leads to the offices on the front of the building. A corridor on each side of the stairway and elevator shaft provided access to the rear (west) and north side offices. A fourth corridor provided access to the fire escape on the south side of the building. Most corridor doors have a single, frosted pane of glass above a paneled lower section. Three-pane transoms top some of the corridor doors but not all. Corridor walls are plaster-covered masonry, and the floors are covered with sheet linoleum.

Each interior office is configured differently, although most have a centrally located waiting room. Those on the rear of the building are the largest. A series of patient examining rooms and offices open off the main waiting room. Doors within each office generally are two-panel wood

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doors and again some are topped with three-pane transoms while others were not. Original door frames are metal. Some of the walls are covered with modern paneling while others retain their original plaster. Many of the interior walls have been moved or otherwise rearranged to meet the needs of the most recent tenant.

The Medical Arts Building presented an impressive and decorative facade to its neighbors which included the homes of many of the doctors, dentists, and attorneys who had offices in the building. In addition to the offices, the building housed related functions on its first floor. The utilitarian interior created a professional atmosphere for patients who visited the building and is typical of offices designed specifically for the medical and dental professions.

Statement of Significance

The Medical Arts Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of architecture as a prominent office building in downtown Newport News and one of the few historic buildings left in the downtown area. Built during the heyday of the City of Newport News, the Medical Arts Building provided offices for some of Newport News' leading health professionals. It is located on West Avenue in what was once considered the "choice residential area" in Newport News and exemplifies the success of Newport News during this period.¹ It is also significant for its association with architect Charles M. Robinson who designed the Medical Arts Building. Robinson is one of the most important and prolific Virginia architects of the early twentieth century and designed hundreds of buildings including schools, churches, department stores, hospitals, and residences. It is one of a few buildings in Newport News designed by master architect Charles M. Robinson.

The period of significance for the building is its date of construction, 1928. The Medical Arts Building retains a high degree of architectural integrity. The only exterior change is the missing transom elements from one of the storefronts. Although some of the interior office areas were changed over the years to accommodate new tenants, the interior retains sufficient architectural integrity to convey its architectural significance as a medical office building.

Historical Background

The origins of Newport News began rather simply. In January 1831, Parker West, a well to do planter, purchased a 265-acre tract of land known as the Newport News farm. The farm was in

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Medical Arts Building
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Warwick County, the second smallest county in the state of Virginia, and an area with a long agricultural history. The land of the Virginia peninsula was known for its limitless production of tobacco since the Colonial Era. While tobacco farming did bring wealth to the area, it also destroyed the soil severely limiting future production. The poor soil condition and the promise of fertile and cheap land in the west resulted in a population decline in Warwick County, a trend that continued until the mid-nineteenth century. However, the advent of scientific farming introduced the practices of crop rotation, deep plowing, and soil fertilization, which resurrected profitable farming in Warwick County. Future expansion and growth in the region would result from the railroad and the work of Collis P. Huntington.²

Collis P. Huntington, an entrepreneur from Harwinton, Connecticut, created his fortune from the railroad. Huntington's dream was "of a new transportation network that would connect the west, the Ohio Valley, and the coal mines of West Virginia with a new port".³ Huntington began this process through his involvement with the practically bankrupt Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad (C & O) and his determination of the location of its eastern terminus. Five Virginia localities were in the running for this coveted title; West Point, Yorktown, a site at the mouth of the Piankatank River, Norfolk, and Newport News. Huntington decided upon Newport News, and construction began on the new railroad extension in 1880 and was completed by 1882.⁴

Collis P. Huntington's interest in Newport News was not limited to the railroad. In October 1880, Huntington established the Old Dominion Land Company. This institution eventually performed the functions of city planning for Newport News. The Land Company acquired 18,000 acres of land and with the assistance of engineer Eugene E. McLean laid out a map of Newport News. A whirl of construction began in Newport News in the early 1880s. The Old Dominion Land Company built piers, grain elevators and two prestigious hotels, the Lafayette Hotel on Huntington Avenue and the Hotel Warwick on West Avenue.⁵ The Old Dominion Land Company also donated land to Newport News for several civic structures. These include the white school on 28th Street, a colored school on 22nd Street, the courthouse at 25th and Huntington Avenue, the Newport News Public Library on West Avenue, and the Riverside Hospital on 15th Street.⁶

Newport News grew at a prodigious rate in the twentieth century, due primarily to hostilities in Europe and World War I. Even after the Armistice, the area continued to grow with booming industry at the shipyards and a population of approximately 100,000 individuals.

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However, by 1922 Newport News was in the throws of a depression driven by massive layoffs at the shipyards. Gradually the shipyards of Newport News were able to pull out of the economic downturn of the early 1920s. Later in that decade the shipyard was awarded various contracts and was again in the business of building ships. Growth was not limited to just the shipyard of Newport News, the city was expanding as well. Newport News gradually annexed surrounding areas in Warwick County, and by 1921 Newport News had doubled in size.⁷

As the rest of the United States dealt with the hardship of the Great Depression, Newport News fared rather well. In 1933, the Maritime Commission started a program that required the construction of fifty ships a year, which brought great prosperity to the shipyard and the city of Newport News. This trend would continue into the 1940s with the beginning of wartime activity in Europe and United States entrance into World War II.⁸ The population of Newport News and Warwick County exploded during and immediately after World War II due to the significant increase in military facilities located in the area. Like many cities in the 1950s and 1960s, Newport News suffered from the flight of middle- and upper-income people out of urban areas. Neighborhoods like those on West Avenue began to falter, the commercial center of Washington Avenue disappeared and the prestige that was once associated with the area vanished.⁹

The Medical Arts Building sits in what was once a prominent Newport News neighborhood along West Avenue. This area of West Avenue included many fine examples of early twentieth-century apartment buildings and the Newport News Public Library.¹⁰ The library opened its doors in 1929 and is an excellent example of a Georgian-revival style building.¹¹ It was built a year after the Medical Arts Building and in the same block. The 1926 Sanborn Map shows that the area surrounding the Medical Arts Building was primarily residential in nature, a far cry from Washington Avenue, the commercial center of Newport News.¹²

The Medical Arts Building was a part of that period of growth in Newport News. It opened in 1928 and was occupied by doctors, lawyers, a drugstore and White Optical. The Medical Arts Building was independent of any hospital. It provided offices for the many in the medical and dental professionals who lived in this neighborhood.¹³ The 1931 Newport News City Directory lists the Medical Arts Pharmacy and White Optical on the first floor and a collection of physicians, dentists, and orthodontists in the rest of the building.¹⁴ The architect's 1928 plans lists physicians O.T. Amory, W. O. Poindexter, and doctors Herman, Payne, Stubbs, and Wood.¹⁵ Many of these doctors are listed in the 1931 city directory as having offices in this building.¹⁶

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The plans also indicated that at least some of these doctors saw African American patients as well as white patients. Colored Waiting Rooms are shown on at least two floors.

In 1971, White Optical was still located in their first floor store. At least two doctors, one of which was W.O. Poindexter, and one dentist who had offices in the building in 1931 continued to occupy those offices in 1971. Within the next twenty years, the type of business concerns that occupied offices here changed. Later tenants of the building included attorneys, insurance agencies, and the Seaman's Union. However, by 1990, only one office was occupied.¹⁷ For the last ten years, the Medical Arts Buildings has been vacant.¹⁸

Charles M. Robinson was the architect for both the Medical Arts Building and the adjacent Newport News Public Library that was built the following year. Charles Robinson was a native Virginian, but studied architecture under D. S. Hopkins of Grand Rapids, Michigan and later John K. Peebles the Petersburg native who practiced architecture in Norfolk for forty-two years. Robinson practiced in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania before returning to Virginia in 1906 and opening a practice in Richmond, Virginia. Robinson is most noted for his school designs that range from the primary to the collegiate. His plans for educational buildings, specifically those at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, James Madison University in Harrisonburg, and Radford University in Radford as well as campus layouts are noteworthy. Known for his schools, churches and hospitals, the Medical Arts Building is one of the few office/commercial buildings designed by Robinson. Other office/ commercial buildings designed by Robinson include the Professional Building Corporate Office Building and the Miller & Rhodes Store Building located in Richmond, Virginia.¹⁹ Robinson incorporated a variety of styles in his designs, often integrating aspects of the Georgian Revival and Beaux-Arts styles. Unlike his teacher John Peebles, Charles Robinson designed few buildings in Newport News; therefore the Medical Arts Building and the Newport News Public Library are important and rare examples of his work in the area.²⁰

End Notes

¹ Reid, Roberta G. and Martha W. McCartney. "Reconnaissance Survey of Historic Architecture Newport News, Virginia." On file at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. 1990.

² Quarstein, John V. and Parke S. Rouse, Jr. *Newport News: A Centennial History*. City of Newport News, Newport News, Virginia. 1996.

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³ Quarstein and Rouse, p 54.

⁴ Quarstein and Rouse, p 54-55.

⁵ Quarstein and Rouse, p 54-56.

⁶ Brown, Alexander Crosby (ed.). Newport News 325 Years. The Newport News Golden Anniversary Corporation, Newport News, Virginia. 1946. p. 18-20.

⁷ Quarstein and Rouse, p. 103-107.

⁸ Quarstein and Rouse, p 122-129.

⁹ Quarstein and Rouse, p 144-145.

¹⁰ Hairston Seawell. Telephone interview. 26 November 2001.

¹¹ Quarstein and Rouse, p 111.

¹² Hairston Seawell, 2001.

¹³ Hairston Seawell, 2001.

¹⁴ Newport News City Directory. Library of Virginia [LVA], Richmond, Virginia. 1931.

¹⁵ LVA. 1931.

¹⁶ Reid and McCartney, 1990.

¹⁷ Reid and McCartney, 1990.

¹⁸ Hairston Seawell, 2001.

¹⁹ Wells, John E. and Robert E. Dalton. *The Virginia Architects: 1835-1955*. New South Architectural Press, Richmond, Virginia. 1997. p. 377-381.

²⁰ Wells and Dalton. p 377-381.

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Newport News, Virginia

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Brown, Alexander Crosby (ed.). Newport News 325 Years. The Newport News Golden Anniversary Corporation, Newport News, Virginia. 1946

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Newport News City Directory. Library of Virginia [LVA], Richmond, Virginia. 1931.

Quarstein, John V. and Parke S. Rouse, Jr. *Newport News: A Centennial History*. City of Newport News, Newport News, Virginia. 1996.

Reid, Roberta G. and Martha W. McCartney. "Reconnaissance Survey of Historic Architecture Newport News, Virginia." On file at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. 1990

Sanborn Map. Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. 1926

Wells, John E. and Robert E. Dalton. *The Virginia Architects: 1835-1955*. New South Architectural Press, Richmond, Virginia. 1997.

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Medical Arts Building
Newport News, Virginia

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property consists of the Medical Arts Building and the lot on which it stands. The lots consists of Lots 5,6,7,8, and 9, Ward 1, Block 145, Map of Newport News located in the Real Estate Assessor's Office, City of Newport News.

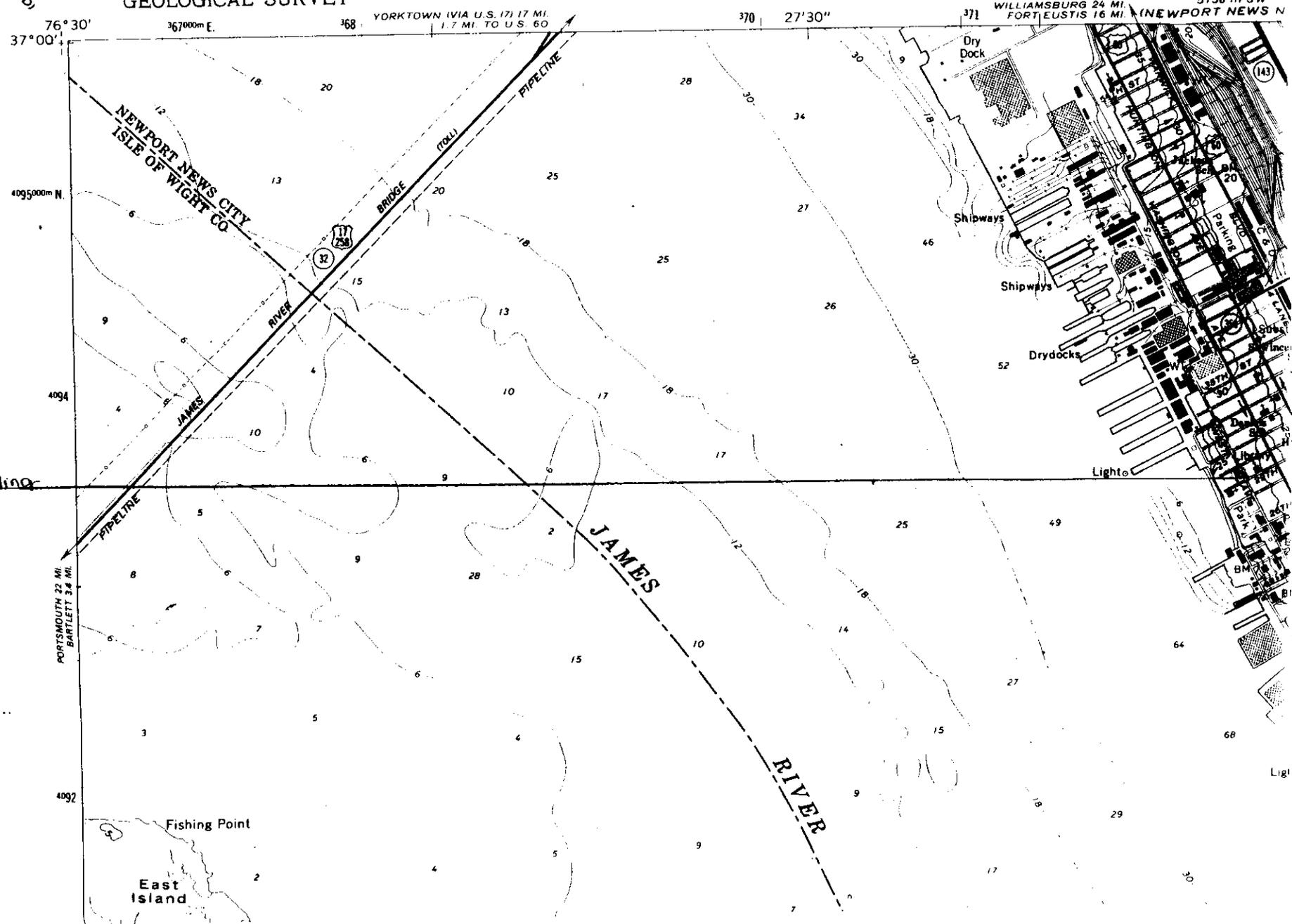
Verbal Boundary Justification

Only the individual property known as the Medical Arts Building and the city lot on which it stands is being nominated.

3638 11 SE
(MULBERRY ISLAND)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DIVISION OF MINERAL RESOURCES



Medical Arts Building
VDHR # 121-D223
LTH: E 372330
N 4093380

PORTSMOUTH 22 MI.
BARTLETT 34 MI.

WILLIAMSBURG 24 MI.
FORT EUSTIS 16 MI.
5758 III SW
(NEWPORT NEWS N