

U.S. Engineer Office
Milwaukee Wis.
June 30, 1937

HISTORY OF SAUGATUCK HARBOR, MICHIGAN

SECTION I. Founding and Growth of the Community

1. Saugatuck Harbor is located on the east shore of Lake Michigan, distant by water 19 miles from South Haven Harbor on the south, 7 miles from Holland Harbor on the north, 90 miles from Chicago, and 89 miles from Milwaukee. The harbor is at the mouth of Kalamazoo River, one of the larger rivers of Michigan, with a drainage area of 2,064 square miles. At a distance from Lake Michigan of 2-1/4 miles by river is the town of Saugatuck with a population of 606 (1930 census). It is on the bank of Kalamazoo Lake, a body of water 3,400 feet long east and west and 2,000 feet wide north and south, formed by a widening of Kalamazoo River. The town of Douglas, with a population of 368, is at the upper end of this lake. Neither of these towns has ever enjoyed the benefits of direct rail connections, the nearest steam railroad shipping points being on the Pere Marquette Railroad at New Richmond, about 6 miles from Saugatuck, and at Fennville, about 8 miles from Douglas.
2. The early history of Saugatuck, an Indian name meaning "the mouth of a river", is closely interwoven with that of Allegan County, in which the harbor and town are located. The first white settlement in the county was in 1829, at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River, where Pottawatomie and Ottawa Indians originally lived. A township organization was perfected in 1836, but Saugatuck was not incorporated into a village until 1869. Previous to 1869 the town of Singapore had sprung up nearer the mouth of the river, where the inner ends of the present harbor revetments join the river. Singapore flourished as a sawmill town, but was entirely abandoned about 1869. Remains of the former buildings were unearthed when the new harbor entrance was excavated in 1906. Although the normal population of the villages of Saugatuck and Douglas has always been small, ranging from 1026 in 1870 to 606 in 1930 for the former and from 522 in 1880 to 368 in 1930 for the latter, the population of each is augmented each season by the influx of summer resorters who find quarters in the numerous hotels, private homes and summer cottages on the shore of Lake Michigan and the mouth of the river.

3. The lumber industry flourished at the harbor during the brief existence of the village of Singapore, and for a time after Saugatuck Village was incorporated in 1869, the finished products being shipped largely to Chicago and Milwaukee by boat. Prior to 1846, flat-bottomed river boats ran from Kalamazoo, 74 miles above the river's mouth, to Saugatuck, and river steamboats plied between Allegan, 38 miles from the mouth, and Saugatuck, from 1858 to 1869, connecting with lake boats. Ship building commenced about 1832 and continued until about 1900.
4. The lumbering era was succeeded by extensive fruit culture, from about 1890 to 1906, and large quantities of peaches and other small fruit were shipped by boat to Chicago. Saugatuck and vicinity is a summer resort of great natural beauty and summer resort activities now constitute the principal business of the town. Resorters arrived and departed in large numbers by boat from Chicago until the boat lines were supplanted by the automobile. Several commercial fishermen make use of the harbor as a means of livelihood for themselves and their families.
5. The condition of the harbor at the mouth of Kalamazoo River was first improved by a private company which obtained a depth of 7 feet in the channel. Its further improvement was commenced by the United States Government in 1869, from which time to 1882 the piers were extended and interior revetments constructed until they had a total length of 1907 feet on the north side and 3,863 feet on the south side of the channel, all of pile work. As the size of the lake craft using the harbor increased, it became difficult for vessels to safely navigate the crooked and narrow channel between Saugatuck Village and the mouth. It was also found expensive to maintain adequate depths on the entrance bar in Lake Michigan and in the river channel, as ordinary storms on Lake Michigan would cause the shifting sand of the lake to fill a dredged channel, thereby closing vessel traffic until the channel could again be dredged out. Accordingly, a new entrance channel was excavated and revetted in 1904-1908, and the old harbor at the river mouth was abandoned. This changed the course of the Kalamazoo River so that it discharged into Lake Michigan about 4,000 feet farther north, eliminated 2 sharp bends in the old river channel, extended the piers at the harbor entrance into deeper water, and provided a navigable depth of 12 feet. The existing project now provides for a channel 16 feet deep, extending from that depth in Lake Michigan to the mouth of the river, and thence 14 feet deep in the river to Saugatuck Village.

SECTION III

7. Chronological Summary by Years of the Harbor Development.

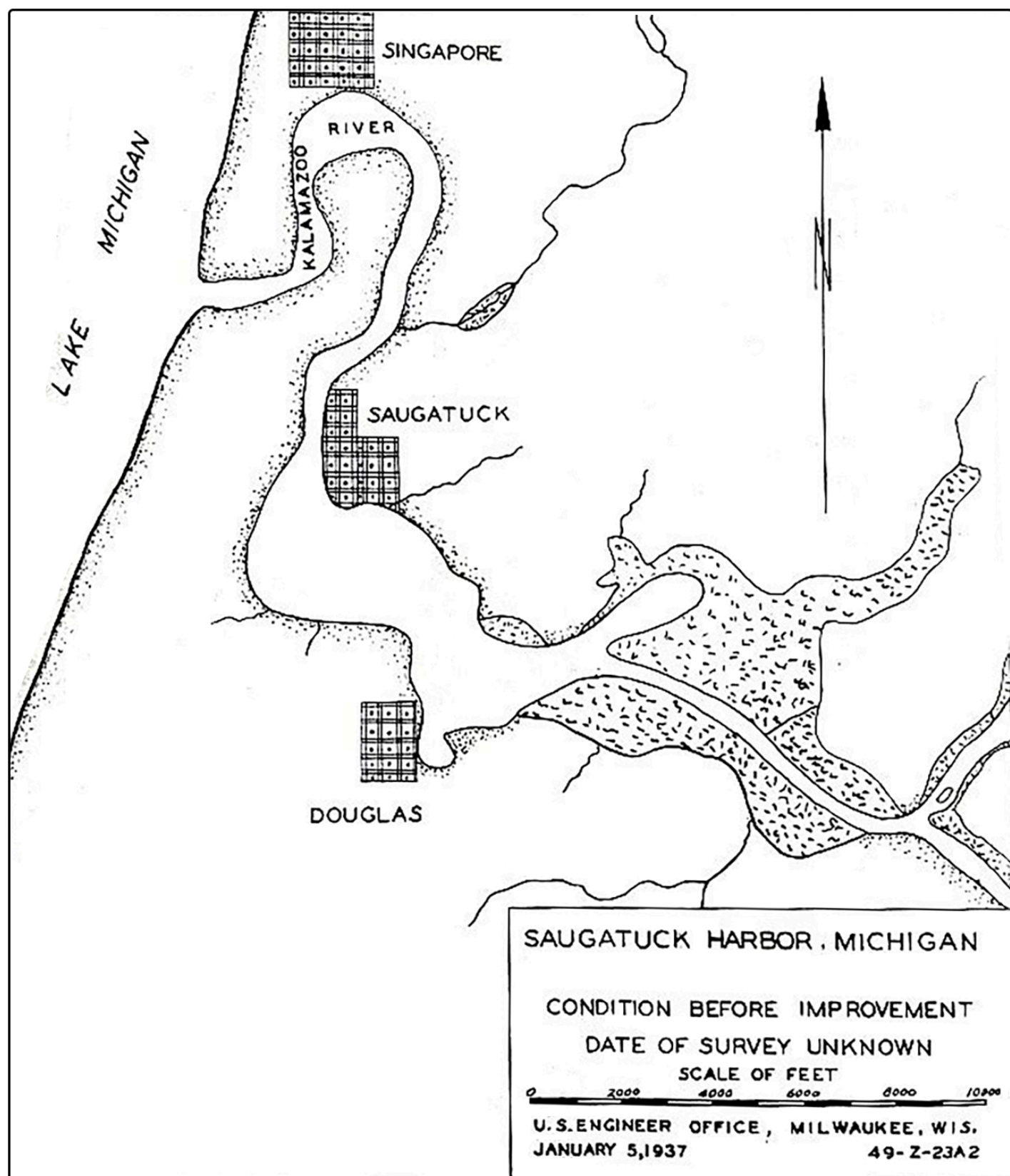
Fiscal year ending June 30	OPERATIONS
1868	A survey was made. Damage to east end of south pier occasioned by a freshet was repaired.
1869	No work done
1870	1200 linear feet south side pile revetment built.
1871	Minor repairs; revetment on south side completed to end of slab pier.
1872	365 linear feet of pile revetment was built; 11,233 cubic yards dredged.
1873	280 linear feet south side pile revetment built; repairs made to old work; pile protection completed.
1874	Wing dam built in river, (243 linear feet long.)
1875	400 linear feet north side pile pier built by hired labor.
1876	334 linear feet north to south pier built; repairs made to south pier
1877	Repairs made to outer 110 feet of south pier and 400 feet of north pier.
1878	Stone was transferred from south to north pier
1879	General repairs were made.
1880	No work done.
1881	520 linear feet of pile and edging revetment built; 10,818 cubic yards dredged from lower reach of channel.
1882	673 linear feet of pile and edging revetment built; a cut was dredged 12 feet deep, 24 feet wide, and 1,560 feet long.
1883	Minor repairs to south pier.

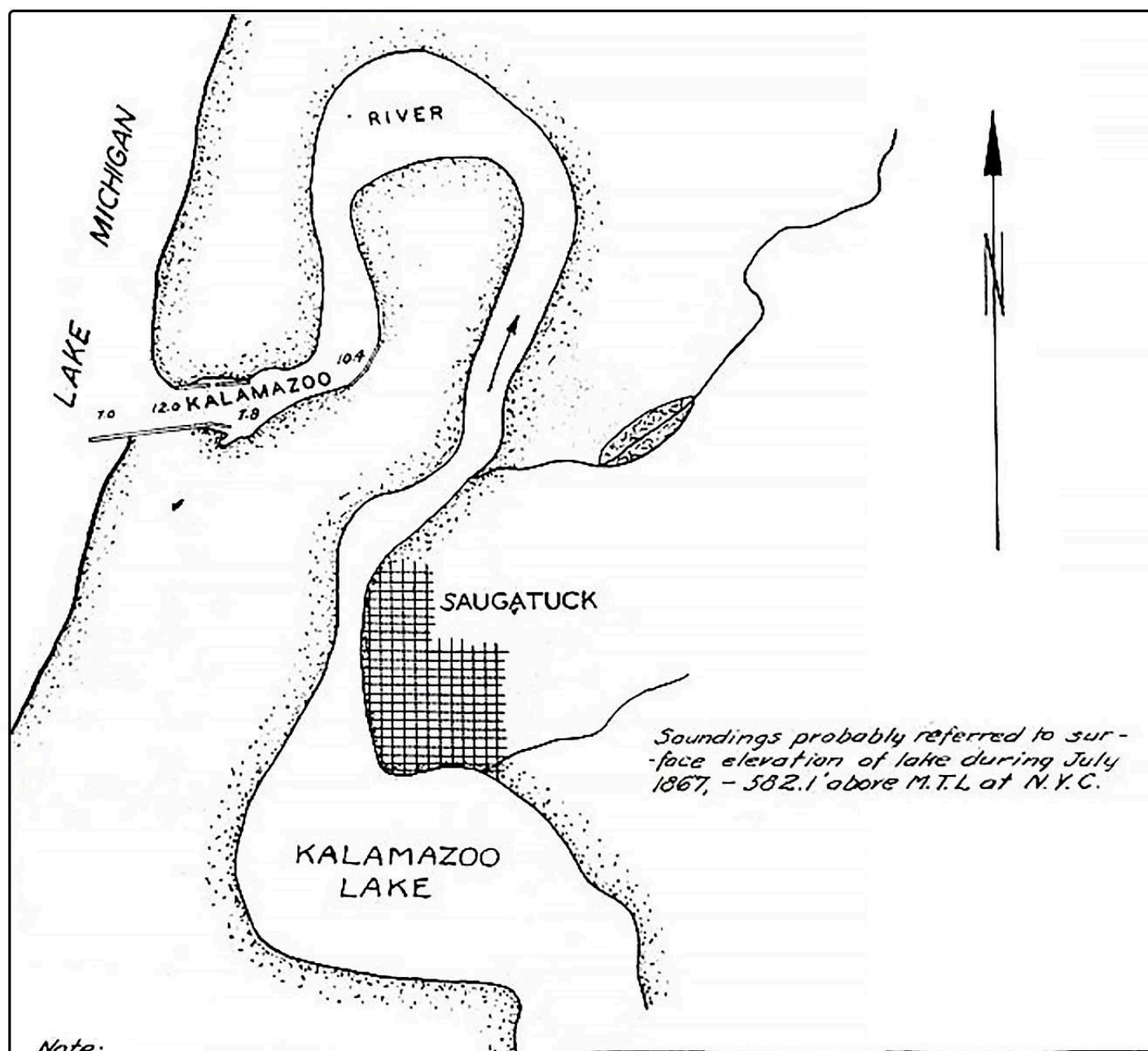
Fiscal year ending June 30	OPERATIONS
1884	175 piles removed from pile dyke above the bend; 33,890 cubic yards dredged from bar at entrance and in channel between the piers.
1885	Repairs to south pier; pier head beacon established; inner work maintained by minor repairs.
1886	No work done.
1887	No work done.
1888	Superstructure reconstructed by hired labor.
1889	No work accomplished.
1890	25,594 cubic yards dredged.
1891	6,615 cubic yards dredged.
1892	No work done.
1893	47,820 cubic yards dredged
1894	17,706 cubic yards dredged.
1895	40,000 cubic yards dredged.
1896	19,000 cubic yards dredged.
1897	108,388 cubic yards dredged
1898	24,553 cubic yards dredged.
1899	11,518 cubic yards dredged.
1900	Dredging was carried on.
1901	36,416 cubic yards dredged.
1902	15,151 cubic yards dredged.

Fiscal year ending June 30	OPERATIONS
1903	31,129 cubic yards dredged.
1904	48,155 cubic yards dredged; work on piers at new harbor entrance was begun
1905	40,313 cubic yards dredged at old harbor; Construction of piers at new harbor entrance was continued.
1906	18,440 cubic yards dredged at old harbor; north and south piers at new harbor entrance, each pier 1,302 feet long, completed; 315,314 cubic yards dredged on excavation of new cut from bent in Kalamazoo River to Lake Michigan.
1907	83,778 cubic yards dredged; 200 linear feet built on shoreward end of each pier; new cut opened up.
1908	61,927 cubic yards dredged; both piers were extended through the new cut to Kalamazoo River; south revetment extended 979.5 feet and north revetment extended 1,243.5 feet.
1909	112,362 cubic yards dredged; repairs made to piers.
1910	72,399 cubic yards dredged; repairs made to piers.
1911	Dredged 6,766 cubic yards.
1912	Dredged 261,240 cubic yards.
1913	Soundings taken.
1914	Soundings taken. Dredged 115,814 cubic yards.
1915	50,299 cubic yards dredged at Government expense; 13,667 cubic yards dredged at private expense.
1916	35,868 cubic yards dredged.
1917	Repairs made to piers.
1918	No work done.

Fiscal year ending June 30	OPERATIONS
1919	No work done.
1920	No work done.
1921	Soundings were taken.
1922	Dredging was done.
1923	Dredging was done.
1924	Dredging was done.
1925	Dredging was done.
1926	Dredging was done.
1927	Soundings were taken.
1928	67,500 cubic yards dredged.
1929	64,017 cubic yards dredged.
1930	Soundings were taken.
1931	Soundings were taken.
1932	28,400 cubic yards dredged.
1933	Repairs made to piers.
1934	55,653 cubic yards dredged.
1935	9,584 cubic yards dredged.
1936	75,491 cubic yards dredged. Repairing substructure and rebuilding superstructure, in concrete, on the outer 800 linear feet of the north and south piers, in progress.

NOTE: The following print, file 49-Z 23A1 shows graphically the above-described construction and repair progress at the new harbor only, by calendar years.





Note:

Improvements, consisting of slab piers or jetties at the river mouth, were made by local interests prior to 1867 at a cost of about \$30,000.

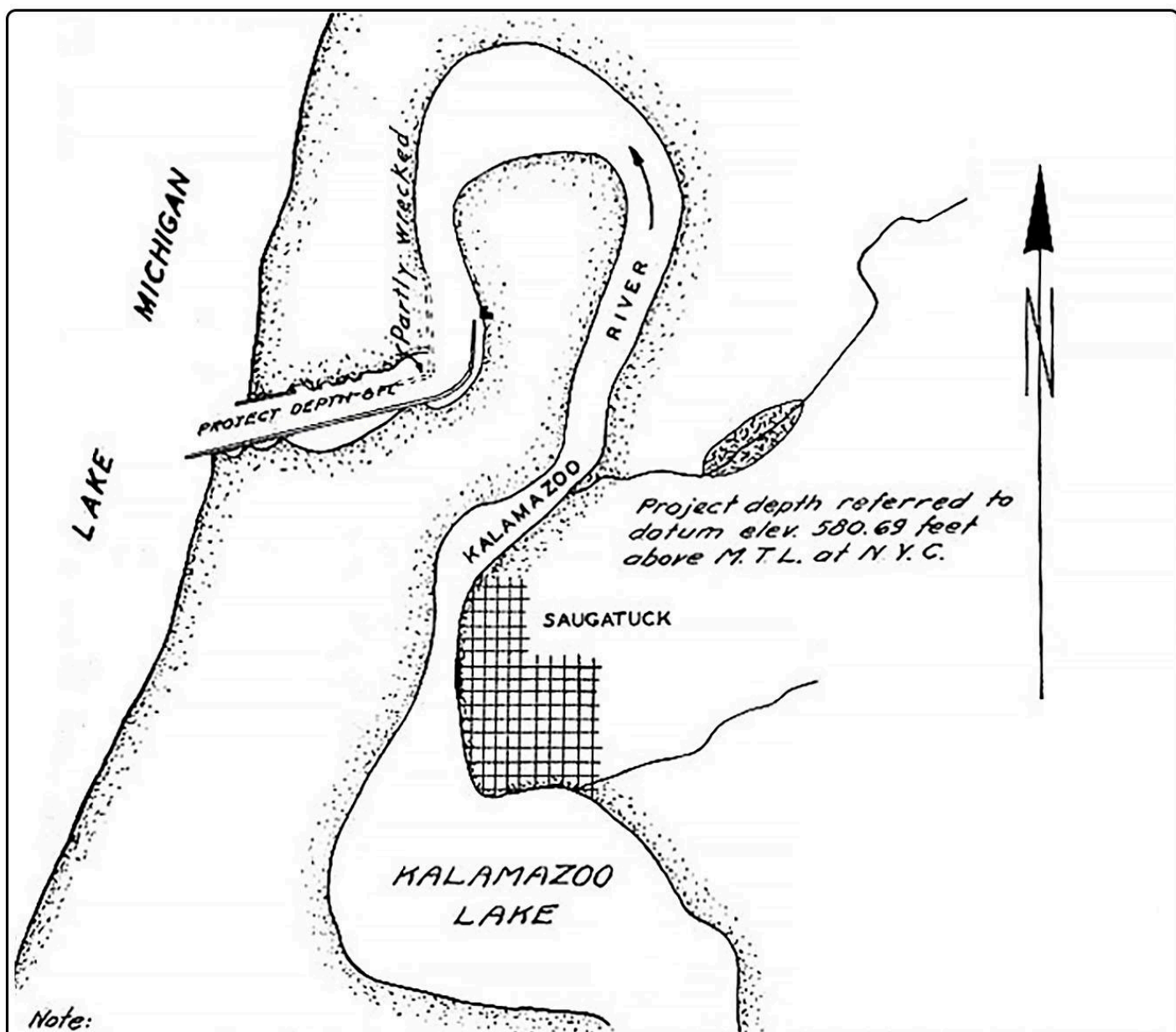
SAUGATUCK HARBOR, MICHIGAN

CONDITION JULY, 1867
FROM SURVEY, JULY, 1867

SCALE OF FEET

0 2000 4000 6000

U.S. ENGINEER OFFICE, MILWAUKEE, WIS.
JANUARY 8, 1937 49-Z-23A3



Note:

The original project adopted July 25, 1868, provided for the extension of the north and south existing piers to a depth of 12 feet in the lake; and for dredging a channel of the same depth between the piers and extending up the river as far as deep water near the first bend. This project with modifications of 1870 and 1882, providing for protection of the river banks and reduction of project depth to 8 feet, was not completed.

Expenditures: To June 30, 1889

	Original Project
New work	\$ 90,231.99
Maintenance	44,766.89
Total	\$134,998.88

SAUGATUCK HARBOR, MICHIGAN

CONDITION MARCH, 1889
FROM SURVEY, MARCH, 1889

SCALE OF FEET

0 2000 4000 6000

U.S. ENGINEER OFFICE, MILWAUKEE, WIS.
JANUARY 7, 1937 49-Z-23A 4

Outline of the Growth. of the Community.

12. The first white settler arrived at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River in 1830. The first lighthouse was built four years later in 1834. The first sawmill was built at Saugatuck, a settlement located near the site of the present entrance channel (see par. 3), in 1837, at a cost of \$60,000, and at the height of lumbering days Saugatuck boasted three large lumber mills, two hotels, several general stores and a bank that issued its own currency. In 1870 the mills at Saugatuck, Saugatuck and Douglas were at their peak of activity, their combined yearly capacity being 39,000 feet of lumber, 16,000,000 shingles, 4,000,000 staves and headings and 2,000,000 lath. This business was made possible only through the harbor facilities afforded at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River, the bulk of the finished products being shipped by water to Chicago. In 1870, 672 vessels entered the port and 670 cleared. Besides lumber products a great deal of leather was shipped from the Morrison, Wallen, and Gerber Tanneries. In one day alone there were 19 vessels loading at the harbor, and others were waiting for a fair wind. The lumber industry at Saugatuck, in common with other harbors on Lake Michigan, began to decline as the pine and hardwood forests were cut down, and the last sawmill at Saugatuck closed down about 1900.

13. The greater part of the freight from the East for Western Michigan in the early days came around the lakes and a large portion of it found its way up the Kalamazoo River on flat boats poled by hand. Flour was carried on the return trip. The "Pioneer" was the name of the first river boat, built in 1839, which ran up as far as Kalamazoo. It carried one hundred barrels of flour and required twelve men to pole it up and down the river. Steamboats did a good business on the river from 1850 to 1869 and served as feeders to the lake craft making use of the harbor Entrance.

14. The fishing industry was started as far back as 1868 by two brothers who located near the mouth of the river and who carried on a very successful fishing business with a tug built at Saugatuck. This industry was later enlarged by the entry of others with fish tugs of their own, and has been continued down to the present day. The average annual catch for the calendar years 1932-1935 was 74 tons valued at \$13,000.

15. Shipbuilding was started in Saugatuck as early as 1832 and was one of the principal industries until about 1894. Some of the largest lake boats were built there between 1880 and 1894. Three boatyards were organized and three or more boats were often "on the ways" at one time. A total of 190 sloops, scows, tugs, schooners, and steamers were built during this shipbuilding era. This industry declined along with the lumber business and was entirely discontinued in 1894.

16. The peach growing era extended from about 1880 to 1906. The first peach trees were brought in during 1839 and their cultivation gradually increased until the western portion of Allegan County was one vast peach orchard and the shipping of peaches to Chicago and Milwaukee became the principal business of the port. The big freeze of 1906, however, ruined thousands of orchards, many of which were never rehabilitated.

17. After the decline of the peach-growing business the community turned to summer resort activities, which have flourished to a remarkable degree due largely to the many natural beauties along the river and Lake Michigan shore, combined with its proximity to Chicago, Milwaukee, Grand Rapids, and other large communities. As stated heretofore, large numbers of resorters arrived and departed via package freight and passenger boat lines, until the advent of the automobile when these boat lines gradually disappeared from the Lake. At the present time the harbor is used largely by privately-owned pleasure boats and commercial fish tugs.

SECTION VII.

Commercial Statistics.

18. The following tabulation shows the total waterborne commerce for the years 1869 to 1935, inclusive:

19. The commercial statistics for the calendar years 1870, 1894, and 1935, are shown in detail in the following tabulations to show the changes and trends for the harbor from its beginning up to date.

COMMERCE FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1870

RECEIPTS & SHIPMENTS

Wood and Slabs	5,281 cords	10,580 Tons
Timber and L1.1mber	50,790 M. ft. B. M.	75,000 "
Flour	770 bbls.	77 "
Bark	60 cords	150 "
Staves, railroad ties, pickets, posts, etc.	297,200 units	6,680 "
Gen. Merchandise	4,460 pkgs.	223 "
Shingles	70,629 M.	8,000 "
Lath	5,291 M.	800 "
Hides	11,287 bdls.(or bales)	564 "
Leather	483,666 lbs.	242 "
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Total		102,316 "

COMMERCE FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1894

SHIPMENTS

Fish	6 Tons
Fruit (misc. pkgs.)	7,755 “
Potatoes	36 “
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Total	7,797 “

RECEIPTS

Coal	500 Tons
Lumber	262 “
Merchandise (gen. pkgs.)	68 “
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Total	830 “

Total Commerce: 8,627 tons

COMMERCE FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1935

RECEIPTS (NO SHIPMENTS)

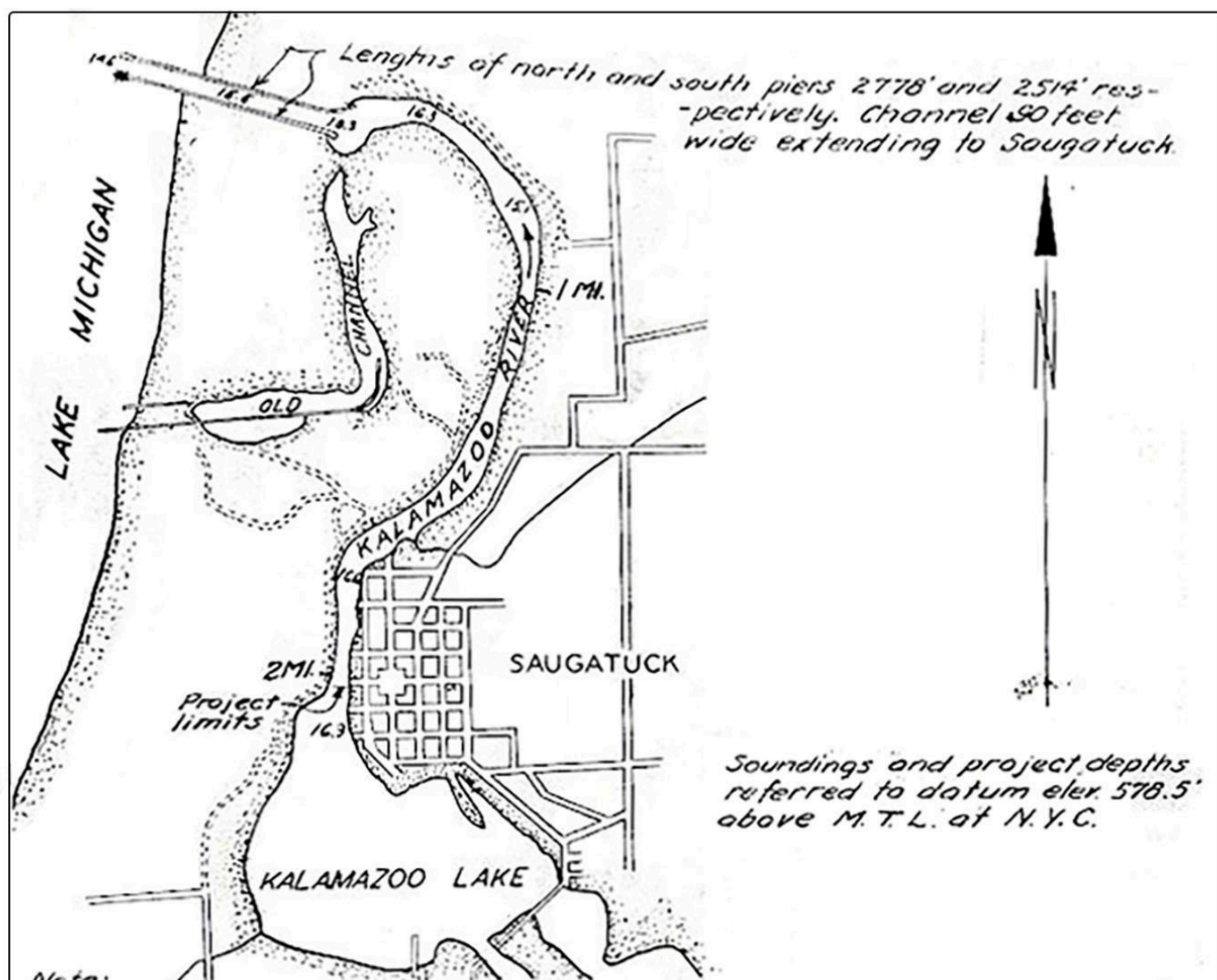
Fish (local catch)	82 tons
Value: \$15,750	Total Commerce: 82 tons

20. The arrivals* of vessels during the calendar years 1869-1935, were as follows:

Cal. year	Steam- ers	Sail- ing Vessels	Motors	Barges	Cal. year	Steam- ers	Sail- ing Vessels	Motors	Barges
1869		(994+)			1901	No Record			
1870		(729+)			1902	395	9		
1871		(558+)			1903	443	13		
1872		(747)	in A.R. 1873		1904	261	11		
1873		(576)			1905	210	0		
1874		(576)	fiscal year		1906	469	25		
1875		(551)	"	"	1907	142	0		
1876		(375)	"	"	1908	331	0		
1877		(332)	"	"	1909	369	6		
1878		(244)	"	"	1910	356	2		
1879		(178)	"	"	1911	352	3		(30)
1880		(206)	"	"	1912	369	3		
1881		(152)	"	"	1913	394	0		
1882		(163)	"	"	(1) 1914	470	1		
1883		(148)	"	"	1915	418	1		
1884		(150)	"	"	1916	325	1		
1885		(181)	"	"	1917	239	1		
1886		No Record			1918	342	1		
1887		"	"		1919	138	2		
1888		(331)			1920	171	0		
1889		(157)			1921	No Record			
1890		(89)			1922	"	"		
1891		(246)			1923	"	"		
1892		No Record			1924	74		2	8
1893		(313)			1925	30		1	
1894		(431)			1926	32			
1895		(628)			1927	No Record			
1896		(424)			1928	"	"		
1897		(293)			1929	"	"		
1898		(665)			1930	"	"		
1899	408	137			1931	"	"		
1900	663	266			1932	42			34
					1933	4			4
					1934	No Record			
					1935	"	"		

*Departures usually the same.

(1) In addition, two small excursion boats made 230 trips between Saugatuck and adjacent harbors.



Note:

The project depth in the river was reduced 2 feet in 1916 (16' to 14') when the datum plane was lowered that amount. The river and harbor act of 1907 authorized the maintenance of the entrance channel to 16-foot depth to allow the free use of the government dredge Meade.

Expenditures: To June 30, 1936.

	Existing Proj.	All Projects
New work	\$274,294.80	\$364,526.79
Maintenance	179,496.65	297,050.58
Total	\$453,791.45	\$661,577.37

SAUGATUCK HARBOR, MICHIGAN

CONDITION SEPT., 1935
FROM SURVEY SEPT., 1935

SCALE OF FEET

0 2000 4000 6000

U.S. ENGINEER OFFICE, MILWAUKEE, WIS.
JANUARY 8, 1937 49-Z-23A6