

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Paul Smith's Electric Light and Power and Railroad Company Complex  
and or common

2. Location

street & number 2 Main Street not for publication

city, town Saranac Lake vicinity of

state New York code 036 county Franklin code 033

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NA in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NA being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Village of Saranac Lake (buildings and dam); County of Franklin (bridge)

street & number 2 Main Street

city, town Saranac Lake vicinity of state New York

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Franklin County Courthouse

street & number Main Street

city, town Malone state New York

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Village of Saranac Lake  
Historic Resources Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1984  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Historic Saranac Lake, 132 River Street

city, town Saranac Lake state New York 12983

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved      date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Paul Smith's Electric Light and Power and Railroad Company complex is located in southern Franklin County on the Saranac River in the village of Saranac Lake. The nominated property is approximately two acres in extent and incorporates four principal elements: two structures (a dam and a bridge) and two buildings (a powerhouse and an office building). The dam and the bridge span the Saranac River, and the two buildings line the south bank, forming an interdependent complex. The waters thus impounded form Lake Flower upstream. All four of these interconnected elements contribute to the significance of the property.

#### Powerhouse

The powerhouse at the rear of 2 Main Street is a single story, one room brick building measuring 40 feet by 55 feet in plan, completed in 1909 for Paul Smith's Power and Light Company. Its battered stone foundation walls, since clad in concrete, are three feet thick at the top and flare to nearly six feet at the base. In places this foundation forms a part of the dam, and in other places a part of the riverbank. When the powerhouse was built, head gates were installed at the Main Street bridge with a flume running underneath the street to carry the water to the two turbines approximately eight feet in diameter then located beneath the powerhouse. Three Rodney Hunt iron gates and controls, still operable, remain in place on the lake side of the bridge. The basement of the powerhouse contains three octagonal turbine pits along the north, riverbank, wall. All the original generating equipment was scrapped during World War II, with the metal going to the war effort.

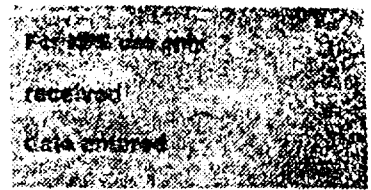
The building is constructed of load-bearing brick walls with wood roof trusses that allowed the unobstructed space necessary to accommodate the original power generation equipment. Until the mid-1940's, this room housed a pair of dynamos and the distributing switchboard for Saranac Lake's electricity. A large cupola with metal pan sheathing rises in the center of the ridge of the gable roof, its east wall perforated with porcelain-lined orifices from which power lines once emerged.

#### Office Building

The Paul Smith's Electric Light and Power and Railroad Company office building at 2 Main Street is the most visible element of the complex. Built in 1927 at a cost of approximately \$275,000, it is a three-story steel and masonry building with a terra-cotta exterior, located at the south side of the flume. While the name of construction engineer John Sweeney, a close associate of Phelps Smith, appears on some drawings, it has not been determined if he was

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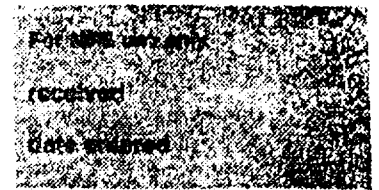
Continuation sheet      Description      Item number 7      Page 2

the architect of the building. The building has a great subterranean chamber below the first floor (once part of the flume), but this space can only be reached through the powerhouse. Placed squarely against the powerhouse in the rear, the new building was designed with an angled facade which parallels Main Street, thus forming a trapezoidal shape. The office building is 66 feet long, east to west, and 40 feet wide. (At the facade it measures 41'7½".) It has twelve-foot ceilings and rectangular steel framed windows on the first two floors, and a fifteen-foot ceiling with original steel framed windows capped by arches on the third floor. The windows have operable lights which open in canopy fashion to provide fresh air.

The structural brick is clad in terra cotta on all but the rear of the building, which abuts the powerhouse; on the new wall above this junction, the brick is covered with a thin cementitious parge coat. The terra-cotta cladding is coarsely textured and colored a pale gray, so that it resembles granite. The first story is separated from the second and third stories by a classical entablature which is supported at the facade by fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals. The third story is capped by a larger entablature with a modillion supported cornice, followed by a short parapet wall at the perimeter of the flat roof. Both upper and lower entablatures continue around the building the full length of both north and south facades.

The Main Street facade is composed of three bays. Each end of the facade has an entry door, with a display window placed symmetrically between them. Decorative, colored ceramic tiles line the street level show window, originally used to display appliances for sale. The facade features a variety of colors, including touches of blue and green glazed terra cotta on the six street-level pilasters framing the two entrances and the display window. Four of the pilasters support intact original lantern-style light fixtures. The frieze above the storefront carries the name "PAUL SMITH'S ELECTRIC LIGHT AND POWER AND RAILROAD CO." in incised capital letters.

The second floor of the Main Street facade features windows with triangular pediments in corresponding positions above the entry doors and paired rectangular windows without trim in the center. Above the paired window is a framed terra-cotta tablet bearing the inscription "POWER AND LIGHT." The third floor features windows on each end of the facade with round arched heads and fanlight muntins. At the center, paired rectangular windows are present, surmounted by a decorative glazed terra-cotta panel consisting of a shield with swags of drapery and ribbons in blue and gold in raised relief.

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Above the third story entablature in the center section of the facade is a bracketed portion of the parapet wall raised to allow space for a polychrome glazed frieze depicting a city, with utility poles, powerlines, and buildings beneath a sky full of clouds and lightning bolts in raised relief.

The south facade is composed of four bays. The first floor has four rectangular openings; three of them contain paired windows, whereas the second from the left contains a doorway. They are framed by narrow terra-cotta moldings in an egg and dart design. The second floor windows repeat the design of those below. The third floor window openings contain paired sash and are headed by round arches with fanlight muntins. The arches are detailed with prominent keystones. The parapet above the third story entablature on the south facade incorporates a raised center tablet, similar to that of the east facade but without decoration.

The north facade fronts upon the Saranac River and is similar in fenestration to the south facade. A four-foot-wide iron balcony projects across the full length of the elevation at the first floor level overlooking the river. Again, the second opening from the left is an entry, in this instance providing access to the balcony. The balcony includes a decorative iron balustrade and is floored in red quarry tiles.

The back of the building, or west elevation, butts up against the powerhouse. Above the roof of the powerhouse, the brick wall of the office building is parged with concrete. Again, the parapet has a plain, raised center section. The west facade has an iron fire escape, with a door to the third floor, and two unadorned windows.

The office building roof is flat and is encircled by a short parapet wall. A terra-cotta clad elevator penthouse with an L-shaped plan rises above the roof in the southeast corner of the building. The penthouse has tall vertical proportions accentuated by pilasters at each of its corners. The penthouse is also detailed with a classical entablature cornice and parapet and decorated with tablets in raised relief which are detailed with swags and wreaths. Small steel sash casement windows are let into its south and east elevations. The 1000 pound capacity Otis elevator is still in place.

The interior of the building is quite plain, though little alteration appears to have occurred. The sub-grade level contains a great, plain, concrete chamber which originally carried water to the

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adjacent powerhouse. The east face, which once opened to the flume, has been blocked off with a concrete wall. The west wall is completely open to the basement of the powerhouse, which originally contained the equipment for generating power.

The first floor interior is simple in finish and open in plan. A display area designed to showcase appliances is located at the east side of the room and includes a large window with tiled surrounds. The floor is finished in terrazzo, currently covered with carpeting. A lightweight interior wall system which allowed for changes in the partitions is apparently original, and one room of this kind on the first floor remains. For the building's new use as municipal offices, a system of freestanding dividers was introduced. A permanent wall along the rear of the main room divides a lavatory and a walk-in safe from the open area. Several original wall sconce lighting fixtures remain in place. Other than the southeast corner of the building (set aside for the accommodation of the stairwell and elevator tower), the interior of the building on all three main floors is free of structural columns and permanent partitions, leaving floor spaces open.

The second floor has a twelve foot ceiling, a terrazzo floor, and one office set aside by the lightweight partition system. A storage room and two separate, white tiled toilet rooms occupy the back section.

The third floor has a fifteen foot ceiling and terrazzo floors, here partially carpeted. Two offices are set off with original partitions, there is a single toilet room, and a fire door giving access to the fire escape.

Original uses of these interior spaces are not fully understood; however, it would appear that all three floors were used for general office activities in which many employees shared a very large room and were overseen by a floor supervisor with a private office.

**Main Street Bridge over the Lake Flower Outlet**

The Main Street Bridge over the Lake Flower outlet is a concrete slab bridge built between 1924 and 1931. This bridge replaced an iron bridge on the same site that existed as early as 1895. The existing bridge is a two-span structure with a concrete deck supported by steel beam stringers. The north span crosses the outlet of Lake Flower. The south span crosses the abandoned intake

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flume to a former hydroelectric power plant located to the west of the bridge. The flume has been sealed at the upstream and downstream faces of the bridge. The flume and the south abutment of the bridge are structurally connected to the Power and Light building, and it therefore seems reasonable to assume that the bridge itself was built in conjunction with the office building and new flume during 1927.

The total bridge length is 83 feet with an overall width of 47.2' and a curb-to-curb width of 35.2'. There is an asphalt overlay on the bridge deck. On each side of the bridge there is a five-foot-wide sidewalk with a four-foot-high reinforced concrete balustrade assembled of pre-cast concrete parts painted white. The balustrades at the east and west sides of the bridge each consist of eight panels with pierced openings separated by simple, undecorated plinths and capped by pre-cast railing sections.

Concrete lighting standards, located at each post on the east and west sides of the bridge, were originally part of the bridge design. One standard on the west side remains substantially intact; the riser from another on the east side is also extant.

The abutments and the center pier are built of concrete and appear to have been reinforced with sheet piling. Four telephone cable conduits are buried in the concrete deck and two water mains are located in the stream bed underneath the bridge. The bridge has a posted load limit of 15 tons.

### Lake Flower Dam and Power Flume

The Lake Flower Dam is currently impounded by a concrete dam constructed with Works Progress Administration assistance between 1936 and 1938. The dam is tied into the office building foundation and extends approximately 70 feet across the Saranac River in a north-south alignment, maintaining a 13.5 foot gross head. A 40-foot wide spillway is located at the south side of the structure and two buttressed floodgate structures are located at the north side. The gates themselves have been modified with modern electrical controls installed during the rehabilitation of the dam in 1986-1987. Water impounded by the Lake Flower Dam was originally diverted for use in the powerhouse through a concrete flume originating east of the 1927 office building. The original Rodney Hunt Co. headgates remain in place and are located on the east side of Main Street just south of the Main Street Bridge. Although temporarily sealed off, the power flume extends west beneath Main Street and passes beneath the office building into the former turbine chamber of the powerhouse. Water

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was returned to the river through three partially submerged parts in the north foundation of the powerhouse. Due to deterioration and a lack of conformance with current flood safety standards, the dam was rehabilitated by the village of Saranac Lake in 1986-1987 and provided with upgraded discharge capacity. The basic design of the dam, however, remains unaltered.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below					
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1938	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)		

**Specific dates** 1908-1938 **Builder/Architect** undetermined

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Paul Smith's Power and Light Company complex in Saranac Lake is historically significant in illustrating the development of one of the Adirondack region's earliest electric utility companies and architecturally significant for the outstanding Neo-classical design of its principal building. Built on the site of an earlier water power facility completed in 1827, the existing plant complex includes an intact 1908 powerhouse building, a stylish 1927 terra-cotta clay powerhouse annex and office building, a c. 1927 steel and concrete bridge designed to complement the design of the office building, and a reinforced concrete dam and flume constructed in 1936-1938 with W.P.A. funding. The components of the nominated property illustrate a continuing process of adaptation and improvement during the 1908-1938 period of significance and attest to the progressive role of this important and influential private utility in the development of Saranac Lake.

The site was first developed by Captain Pliny Miller, Saranac Lake's second recorded settler, who had established a dam and a sawmill at a waterfall on the Saranac River by 1827. After his death in 1859, his son John built a hotel nearby.

In 1888, a new owner (Wallace Murray) took over and changed the name to the "Riverside Inn"... Since his rooms and new porches overlooked the mill pond, Murray was concerned with the vista. Ever since the original flooding the pond was infested with a mess of ugly stumps which protruded above the water line.

After wining and dining Governor Roswell P. Flower at a grand ball in his honor, Murray approached him for state funds to eliminate the navigational hazards and beautify the mill pond. The funds were made available, and henceforth the mill pond was known as "Lake Flower."

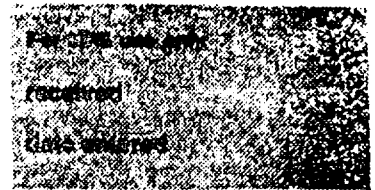
On September 20, 1894, the Saranac Lake Electric Company was formed. The basis of its physical plant was the dam and sawmill that Captain Pliny Miller had built in 1827.

In 1905, Paul Smith and his two sons formed the Paul Smith's Electric Light and Power Company, with generating capacity from Franklin Falls and Union Falls much greater than the 290 kilowatt capacity at the Lake Flower site. On January 16, 1907, Paul Smith bought the Saranac Lake Electric Company for \$125,000. Captain Miller's timber built mill was replaced in 1908 with the existing



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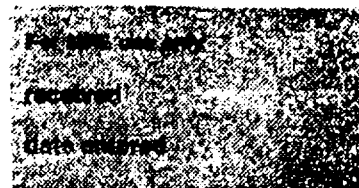
substantial brick structure built to house the electrical generators. Head gates were installed at the Main Street Bridge, then an iron bridge, with a flume running under the street to carry the water to the two Lefell water turbines beneath the plant. Drive belts conveyed power from the turbines to a pair of Stanley dynamos on the floor above. Paul Smith died in 1912, and his son, Phelps Smith, became president of the electric company. The Saranac Lake facility was run from rented offices until Phelps Smith decided to build his own office building. In 1927 the new Paul Smith's office building was erected directly astride the old flume which ran beneath the new building to connect with the 1908 plant at the rear. The office building was handsomely constructed of steel and terra cotta to a height of three stories complete with an electric elevator.

Phelps Smith died in 1937. The proceeds of his estate were left to support the formation of Paul Smith's College, with Paul Smith's Hotel to be the basis of its physical plant. Therefore, from 1937 to 1966, the college owned and operated the power company. Because of the very limited supply of water in Lake Flower and particularly the inability to control the flow of water due to restricted water rights, power generation at this site was abandoned by the company. The old machinery was scrapped in late 1941 or 1942 during World War II, with the metal going to the war effort. The Paul Smith's Company merged into Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation in 1966, and they used the office building until recent years. The village acquired the buildings and part interest in the bridge in 1986.

The 1927 Power and Light Company Office Building at 2 Main Street is architecturally significant in the context of Saranac Lake's architectural development as a rare and distinctive example of Neo-classical architecture, and as one of only two examples in the village of the historic use of architectural terra-cotta as an exterior cladding material. Built during the prosperous years which preceded the Great Depression, the stylish design of the building and its extravagant use of terra-cotta projected an image of optimism and confidence in the future. The design of the office building is consistent with the national popularity of the Neo-classical style during the 1920's and is characterized by its symmetrical facades and vocabulary of richly detailed Neo-classical architectural elements including round-arched and pedimented window openings, fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals and fully developed entablatures with denticulated cornices. Only one other major example of Neo-classical design is present within the village core, the 1928 Harriestown Town

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Hall at 30 Main Street, built of brick and distinguished by a multi-staged domed clock tower.

The use of terra-cotta in the design and construction of the office building is rare in the context of Saranac Lake's architectural development and illustrated by only one other example in the village, the 1924 Tousley Building at 38-40 Main Street. Although widely used in American urban areas during the first three decades of the twentieth century, its rarity in Saranac Lake was probably explained by the village's remote location, and the difficulty and expense of importing the material and obtaining experienced workmen qualified to handle it. The artistic properties and versatility of this ceramic material are fully exploited in this example and demonstrate the ability of this material to articulate the complex forms and details characteristic of the Neo-classical style. The surface finish of the terra-cotta in the office building varies from a granular and slightly speckled texture suggestive of granite to glazed polychromatic details evident in the plaques which embellish the facade.

The powerhouse is the only building in Saranac Lake known to have been built during the ownership of Apollos "Paul" Smith, a famous Adirondack guide, hotelier, raconteur and developer. Most of his working life was spent at the hotel in the little community named for him, Paul Smiths, about 10 miles northwest of Saranac Lake. In the latter part of his life he developed an interest in hydroelectric power, which then led to his acquisition of the old Saranac Lake plant. This facility had preceded Smith's hydroelectric development at Franklin Falls and Union Falls but was much smaller in its generating capacity. Smith is important for his lifelong friendship with Dr. E.L. Trudeau, whose Adirondack destination when he was dying of tuberculosis was Paul Smith's Hotel. These two individuals were major figures in Saranac Lake's late nineteenth and early twentieth century economic development.

The period of time in which the 1927 office building was built was a time in which several other large scale public and commercial buildings were constructed in the village. The Harriestown Town Hall, the Hotel Saranac, Petrova School, the U.S. Post Office and the Tousley Building were all constructed in the period from 1923-1927. These buildings also illustrate an emphasis on the use of permanent materials and Neo-classical styling and together with the office building represent the climax of architectural development in Saranac Lake.

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In 1936-1938, a new concrete dam integral to the complex was built by the village with W.P.A. funds, replacing a previous wooden dam a few yards upstream. Construction is well documented in historic photographs of each stage of the work. The Paul Smith's Company donated \$10,000 toward the cost of the new dam, which was fastened to the north wall of the office building. Because the concrete from the 1938 dam had badly deteriorated from freezing and thawing, especially at the waterline, a rehabilitation of the dam and spillway was undertaken in 1986-1987.

The concrete Main Street Bridge that exists today replaced an iron span and was constructed sometime between December 1924 and January 1931, according to Sanborn maps. Though no specific date of construction can be found, it appears likely that it was built at the same time as the office building since extensive alterations to the site required during the construction of the office building probably required changes to the configuration of the earlier bridge. Phelps Smith's considerable influence may well have been a factor in causing a new bridge to be built which complemented his fine new building. The design of the pre-cast concrete balustrades, detailed with pierced openings, and originally carrying light standards is distinctive within the village for its degree of formality and concern for design.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Approximately 2 acres

Quadrangle name Saranac Lake

Quadrangle scale 1:25 000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	5	6	9	1	7	0	4	9	0	8	0	4	0
Zone		Easting			Northing									

B 

Zone		Easting			Northing									

C 

Zone		Easting			Northing									

D 

Zone		Easting			Northing									

E 

Zone		Easting			Northing									

F 

Zone		Easting			Northing									

G 

Zone		Easting			Northing									

H 

Zone		Easting			Northing									

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Refer to Item 7 and attached site map.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

# 1. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary B. Hotaling, Executive Director

organization Historic Saranac Lake date September, 1987

street & number 132 River Street, P.O. Box 1030 telephone 518-891-0971

city or town Saranac Lake state New York 12983

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

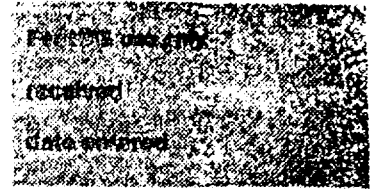
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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Major

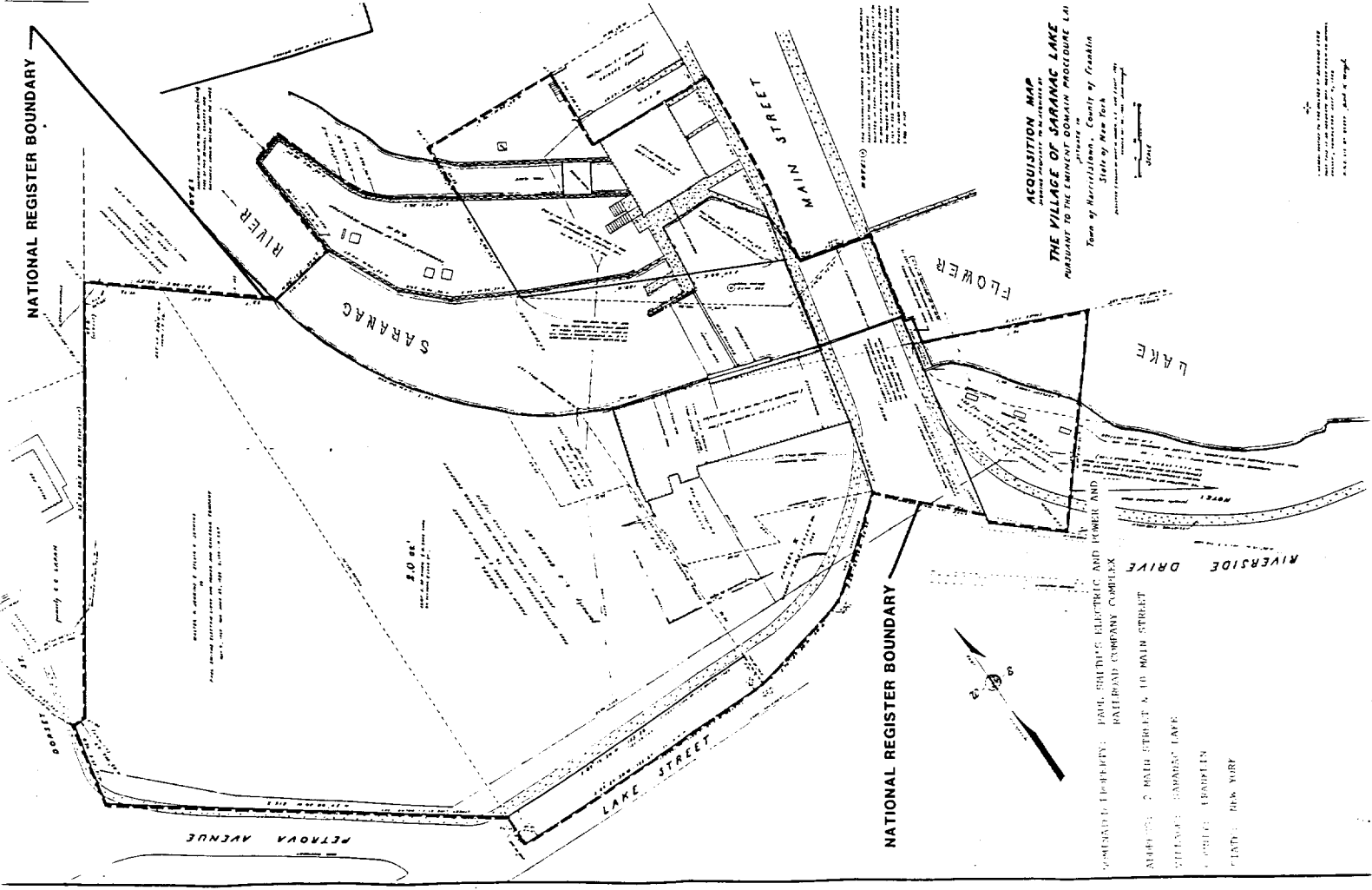
Continuation sheet Bibliographical References Item number 9

Page 1

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Sanborn-Perris Map Co., New York, 1895 to 1931 inclusive.



**ACQUISITION MAP**  
 PREPARED BY THE STATE OF NEW YORK  
**THE VILLAGE OF SARANAC LAKE**  
 PURSUANT TO THE EMINENT DOMAIN PROCEDURE LAI  
 Article 17, Section 10  
 Passed in  
 Town of Herkulesburg, County of Franklin  
 State of New York  
 Session 1908-1909

THIS MAP WAS PREPARED BY THE STATE OF NEW YORK PURSUANT TO THE EMINENT DOMAIN PROCEDURE LAI, ARTICLE 17, SECTION 10, PASSED IN THE TOWN OF HERKULESBURG, COUNTY OF FRANKLIN, STATE OF NEW YORK, SESSION 1908-1909.