

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: Petersburg Gas Company

Other names/site number: Petersburg Gas Light Company; DHR No. 123-0036

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: 416-436 Bank Street

City or town: Petersburg State: VA County: Independent City

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

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 local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

 Signature of certifying official/Title:	<u>1-12-2026</u> Date
<u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> 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

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>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/Manufacturing Facility/Processing Plant/Gas Works

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

OTHER: Industrial Works

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, WOOD

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Located east of downtown Petersburg and alongside the I-95 corridor, the former Petersburg Gas Company building served as a Gas Works for all of its history, beginning in 1851, until becoming vacant in the early twenty-first century. It is a Commercial Style, one-story, two-bay rectangular brick masonry industrial building. It has a brick foundation, with a poured concrete foundation supporting the central third of the building. The roof is in roughly three sections; all are gabled and clad in corrugated metal. The western exterior wall consists of six-course running bond brick, with slightly protruding piers at the two sides. The eastern end of the current building has two bays, each featuring paired window openings on the first and second levels. Protruding sections of brick form a frame and visually divide the pairs of windows into four inset boxes. Each window has a brick arch and stone sill. While boarded up on the exterior, the interior shows the intact six-over-nine historic wood sash. Above the upper story windows is a shallow corbeled brick cornice which continues around the entire exterior of the building, with some gaps that were damaged. The north elevation is two stories for the first three bays on the east end, then reduced to a tall single story for the remainder of the building towards the west end. The bays echo the same recessed design as the south elevation but feature a different window configuration. The majority contain a series of brick arched windows of two heights, and at the

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west end of the elevation are four bays of filled-in panels with smaller twentieth-century windows. The interior of the former gas works is divided into distinct sections, mirroring the divisions on the exterior. These divisions have existed since at least 1927, as seen in a Petersburg Gas Company Gas Works Property Plan, though likely far longer. There is also an early twentieth century contributing mechanical building. In addition to the gas works and the mechanical building, the nominated property includes one noncontributing resource, a natural gas converter, which postdates the property's period of significance. A modern, small-scale, drop-in shed and drop-in carport are located southwest of the gas works building. The property has high integrity of location, design, workmanship, materials, and association. The integrity of setting and feeling are fair due to the loss in 1989 of a Victorian-era, cast iron gas tank frame that once stood directly south of the building.

Narrative Description

SETTING

The Petersburg Gas Company building is located east of downtown Petersburg and along the west side of the I-95 corridor. The setting immediately surrounding the nominated property includes recent redevelopment, with newer buildings standing across Madison and Bank Streets to the north and west. Directly to the west is the easternmost boundary of the Petersburg Old Town Historic District (NRHP 1980; 123-0097). The construction of the I-95 corridor during the middle decades of the 20th century altered the built environment east of the nominated property due to the loss of numerous historic buildings, and the reconfiguration of some surface streets leading into and out of downtown Petersburg.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Petersburg Gas Company (ca.1851) – Contributing Building

EXTERIOR

The former Petersburg Gas Company building served as a part of a gas works facility for all of its history, beginning in 1851, until becoming vacant in the early twenty-first century. It is a Commercial Style, one-story, two-bay rectangular brick masonry industrial building. It has a brick foundation, with a poured concrete foundation supporting the central third of the building. The roof is in roughly three sections; all are gabled and clad in corrugated metal. The east section (A) (see attached Building Sections plan) features a full-length central monitor roof. The building's central section (B) has a simple gable continued from the east section, but without the monitor roof. The western third of the building (sections C-D) has a slightly offset roof and features a small, central penthouse. The eastern end of the roof features a substantial stepped parapet, with three large steps. The western end had a similar roofline in 1865 but now features a simple parapet with a central shallow gable form.¹ The western exterior wall consists of six-

¹ Multiple accounts describe damage to the Gas Works during the Civil War, and the May 1865 photograph (Alexander Gardner) shows notable damage to multiple sections of brick. The caption for the photograph states that the damage was "sustained from General Grant's lines, which, during the year 1864, were advanced to within a mile

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course running bond brick, with slightly protruding piers at the two sides. The eastern end of the current building has two bays, each featuring paired window openings on the first and second levels. Protruding sections of brick form a frame and visually divide the pairs of windows into four inset boxes. Each window has a brick arch and stone sill. While boarded up on the exterior, the interior shows the intact six-over-nine historic wood sash. Above the upper story windows is a shallow corbeled brick cornice which continues around the entire exterior of the building, with some gaps that were damaged.

The 1865 photograph of the building appears to show the north elevation and the east end. The length of the building in 1865 featured thirteen inset bays, each with a single window opening (though most bricked in), a clear stone lintel and sill, and topped by a similar stepped cornice as is seen today. The current north and south elevations both feature similar bays as seen in the 1865 photograph, though most have variations in the decorative brickwork, as well as changes to the openings. A notable variation is the presence of curved arches on the east end, suggesting a different period of construction. The current south elevation has a variety of inset bays, though most are altered in some fashion. The current central (B) section shows three bays with different configurations within the frame: a garage door, filled-in, paired, arched window openings, and a single rectangular, boarded-over window opening. The eastern one-third of the current south elevation shows the upper cornice intact, but the exterior wall bears the ghost marks of an addition likely added during a late-nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century renovation, which has since been removed. The western one-third of the south elevation is largely obscured by a 1980s, one-story cinderblock addition. However, above the addition, the familiar cornice is still intact and, viewed from the west, the brick bays are also still present. The north elevation is two stories for the first three bays on the east end, then reduced to a tall single story for the remainder of the building towards the west end. The bays echo the same recessed design as the south elevation but feature a different window configuration. The majority contain a series of brick arched windows of two heights, and at the west end of the elevation are four bays of filled-in panels with smaller twentieth-century windows. The four western bays most closely resemble the 1865 photograph configuration.

Overall, along the north and south elevations of the building, there are slight variations in the brick detailing between the building sections. While some portion of the gas works building certainly dates to the original period of construction, there were substantial repairs after extensive damage during the Civil War. Additionally, there were updates and renovations to the facility later in its history. Definitive dating of each section would entail an involved, detailed analysis of the brick masonry throughout the building. However, a 2019 evaluation offers an effective analysis of the building's sections and potential periods of construction.² The report proposes that the western section (Section D), consisting of four bays on the long sides, constitutes the remaining portion of the original 1851 building. The single bay section (E) at the

and a half of this spot. Some elements of the current building are certainly from the initial 1851 date of construction. Variations in brick detailing, and the certain need for post-Civil War renovations lend support to elements of the building dating to the post-Civil War period.

² Darren Quillen and Leonard G. Rafalko (Environmental Resources Management), *Draft Structural Evaluation for Selected Razing of the Former Retort Building, Columbia Gas of Virginia – Petersburg* (Annapolis, MD: 2019).

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far western end is part of the ca 1980s addition. The remainder of the building (Sections A, B), including the single bay connector (Section C), are from the post-Civil War period, though certainly from the nineteenth century. The report utilizes a combination of foundation and structural analysis to reach this conclusion.³

INTERIOR

The interior of the former gas works is divided into distinct sections, mirroring the divisions on the exterior. These divisions have existed since at least 1927, as seen in a Petersburg Gas Company Gas Works Property Plan, though likely far longer. The interior of the east end of the building (Section A) consists of a large, open two-story room with exposed brick walls and a dirt floor. The foundation appears to be brick masonry. The fenestration observed on the exterior is visible on the interior, with the east and north walls featuring four pairs of window openings with wood frames, brick arches, and many retaining the historic six-over-nine wood sash. All of the windows are boarded up on the exterior. The brick walls are unadorned, and the spacing of the header courses is inconsistent. The west wall is a solid brick interior wall with no penetrations but shows signs of many stages of repairs over a long period. The bottom twenty percent of the wall consists of a historic poured concrete foundation, while the rest of the wall is brick masonry, again with inconsistent spacing of the header rows. The south wall consists of the same brickwork as the other walls, also with substantial repair work completed over many years. However, there are several penetrations of varying sizes and placement, likely serving as functional connections to the addition that once abutted the exterior of the southeast end of the building. The largest opening is at the ground level and likely functioned as an access point for equipment or delivery vehicle access.

The next section (B), heading west through the building, is smaller and shorter than the first section with only one story. The walls are all painted brick masonry. The east wall (shared with section A) has no penetrations or filled-in windows. The north wall has four brick and concrete block-filled windows with brick arches. The west wall also has four similar window openings, with brick arches and filled only with brick masonry. These west wall windows imply that this was an exterior wall at some point. The lower south corner of the wall features a single-leaf unadorned wood door providing access west to the next section (C). Continuing through Section B, the south wall of this section has several features demonstrating changes in use over time. On the east side, there are two brick arched window openings, similar to the others, both filled with brick and concrete block. There is a single-leaf metal doorway cut into the bottom of the central window opening. The west side of the wall features a large wood-paneled, roll-up garage door, which fills the space that likely once would have been occupied by two window openings.

The next section heading west (C) is narrow (approximately eight feet wide) and appears to have been reworked to accommodate a new function. The interior consists of faux wood paneling and dropped acoustical ceiling tiles. Above the dropped ceiling is a metal roof, which is lower than the primary roof. From the exterior, there is a large opening on both the north and south

³ Quillen and Rafalko, *Draft Structural Evaluation for Selected Razing of the Former Retort Building*, p.1-3.

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elevations, which is above the secondary roof, but just below the primary gabled corrugated metal roof. The upper sections of the north and south walls under the secondary roof have been rebuilt with concrete block. The east wall is the exposed brick wall shared with the previous section of the building.

The next section to the west (D) is approximately the size of Section B with mostly exposed brick masonry walls, with some modern brick and concrete block repair infill. However, there is a second-story attic constructed above most of this section. The attic is accessed from a historic metal stairway in the last section (E). Section E is a much shorter metal frame addition at the far west end of the building. Its east wall is brick masonry and shared with Section D. The rest of the one-room addition has concrete block walls and a concrete floor. The room currently houses the building's electrical service equipment; however, the 1927 map has this area labeled as a separate addition. Likely the current 1980s cinderblock exterior was added to the existing envelope of Section E. From this area, the previously mentioned stairway climbs east into the attic over Section D. The attic provides a closer view of the upper brick masonry walls and the wood framing supporting the corrugated metal gable roof system. All of the roofing material is clearly much newer than the brick masonry, which appears much like the brickwork in the rest of the building. The floor of the attic is wood boards. The windows are horizontal pane metal sash with operable hopper lower sections.

The 1980s addition to the southwest end of the building is nondescript with concrete block walls, concrete floors and dropped acoustical tile ceilings. The roof is a metal truss system with corrugated metal cladding.

Mechanical Building (ca.1920), Contributing Building

In addition to the main building, the nominated property includes one contributing secondary resource, a ca. 1920 frame and metal-clad equipment building, which rests on a concrete foundation.

Natural Gas Converter (ca.1980), Noncontributing Structure

A ca. 1980 grouping of metal piping used for natural gas distribution is a noncontributing structure because it postdates the property's period of significance.

A drop-in, corrugated metal shed (ca. 2020) and a drop-in, corrugated metal carport (ca. 2020) are not included in the count of contributing and noncontributing resources due to their small scale and impermanent character.

INTEGRITY ANALYSIS

The resource retains strong integrity for an industrial building approaching two centuries in existence. The location, design, feeling and association are all intact. The setting is somewhat compromised by the later buildings across Madison and Bank Streets and due to the 1989 loss of a Victorian-era, cast iron gas tank frame that once stood directly south of the building. The

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materials and workmanship retain a surprising level of integrity, especially when the damage incurred during the Civil War is considered. Additionally, the damage, repairs and nineteenth century additions after the war retain their own integrity linked to the conflict. Overall, this resource is a remarkable example of a mid-nineteenth-century industrial building which retains much of its original design, while also featuring alterations which reflect its exposure to warfare and changing functionality.

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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

1851- 1955

Significant Dates

1851
1864-1865

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Petersburg Gas Company building at 416-436 East Bank Street, at the corner with Madison Street, in Petersburg, Virginia, is significant at the statewide level under Criterion A in the area of Industry. The Period of Significance spans from the construction of the core gas works building in 1851 through ca. 1955, when the facility stopped playing a role in the gas manufacturing process. The company was technically chartered in 1841, but was established in 1851, coinciding with the construction of the gas works. Significant dates correspond to the establishment of the company and construction of the gas works in 1851, and during the Civil War, from 1864-1865, the smokestack at the Gas Works was destroyed; this damage, and the resulting renovations, were likely the first alterations to the building.

The Petersburg Gas Company manufactured gas for government, commercial, and residential use, first for lighting and later for heating and power. The facility was used to manufacture gas for more than a century, only interrupted by damage to the building during the Civil War. Several accounts trace the expansion of the facility, its changing level of production, and the variety of uses for its product, all of which mirrored the larger development and evolution of the gas industry in the United States, from the antebellum period through the mid-twentieth century. The building also retains impressive architectural integrity given its age and its direct involvement in the Civil War. Its appearance today is quite similar to photographs from the mid-nineteenth century.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

History and development of the Petersburg Gas Company

The Petersburg Gas Light Company was incorporated on March 9, 1841, which is recorded in the *Act of the Virginia Assembly, 1840-41*. In anticipation of the construction of a Gas House, in 1848, the city required the Old Southern Railroad to establish a spur to the proposed Gas House location.⁴ As early as 1850, “Mr. White and two Davis brothers from New York or Philadelphia” applied to the Petersburg City Council for a Charter to build a “Gas Works” to provide the city with gas service. They obtained approval, and it is claimed that a majority of Council members also became stockholders in the new enterprise. The Petersburg Gas Light Company was officially organized in 1851 by charter from the General Assembly.⁵

⁴ Historic Petersburg Foundation, “Petersburg Gas Light Company Gas Holder,” Preliminary Form (Richmond: Department of Historic Resources, 1988).

⁵ Edward Pollock, *Historical and Industrial Guide to Petersburg, Virginia* (Petersburg, VA: 1884), p.92; R.A. Godwin, *Selected History Re: Gas Works* (Petersburg, VA: April, 1916), p.5, 6. The latter source is a “history of Petersburg and her Gas Company,” completed in 1916 by the then-Manager of the facility for the General Auditor of the American Gas Company in Philadelphia, PA: Alfred P. Post. This report, which includes a fair amount of city history of dubious quality, includes a vast amount of information regarding the Petersburg Gas Company and this particular Gas Works building from its construction until 1916.

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Upon completion of the Gas Works, subsurface mains (main lines) were laid to deliver gas service, beginning with the “most important parts of the city” and city buildings. By the second year, approximately four miles of mains had been laid serving an estimated 150 customers. Rates started at \$6.00 per M. Cu. Ft., with an additional meter rent fee of ten cents and a ten-cent service charge. Customers paid for meter installation and meters were read every three months. January 6, 1851, was the date of the first contract for municipal street lighting, consisting of “ninety open flame street lamp posts” with the City of Petersburg paying \$3.50 per M. Cu. Ft.⁶

The earliest version of the Gas Works featured four benches with iron retorts and timber mains. Initially, rosin and pine knots were used to produce gas “until a vein of coal was struck just across the river in Chesterfield.” Before the Civil War, teams of oxen delivered the rosin and pine knots to the gas works.⁷ The rest of the works consisted of a small lift Holder with a 20,000 square foot capacity, a portable boiler, and an oyster shell box to serve as a purifier. There was heavy trading of Petersburg Gas Lighting Company stock in the early years, and the original investors soon lost control of the enterprise.⁸

During the Civil War, the smokestack at the Gas Works was destroyed as the Union forces across the Appomattox River had been using it as a range finder. The Gas Works was hit by shells several times during the war, and damage is clearly seen in a May 1865 photograph. The caption of the photograph describes an approximately eighty-foot brick smokestack, which was toppled by fire from General Grant’s lines, resulting in the pile of debris seen in the photograph. This damage, and the resulting renovations, were likely the first alterations to the building.⁹

⁶ Godwin, *Selected History Re: Gas Works*, p.6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.4, 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

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Figure 1: “View of Petersburg Gas Works”, *Gardner’s Photographic Sketch Book of the War*, May 1865, A Gardner

Also known commonly as the Petersburg Gas Works, the company was integrated into the community more than may have been typical for a utility company in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1867, a new gas lighting system was installed in the Washington Street Baptist Church, which allowed congregants to read anywhere in the building. The lights consisted of an arrangement of gas burners in a circle on the ceiling surrounded by additional arrangements of burners supplemented by large glass reflectors. The reflectors and burner arrangement was designed by William H. Baxter, the Petersburg Gas Works Superintendent, and installed by J.B. Brady, a company gas fitter. A newspaper article concluded that the arrangement was a great reflection on the skill of the two men, and by inference, the gas company.¹⁰

During 1873-1874, the city’s lighting used 3,000,000 cubic feet of gas, and the collective length of gas mains had reached 15 miles with 600 private service meters. In 1875, the original Old Petersburg Gas Lighting Company franchise expired, and the company was required to negotiate a new agreement with the city as well as a new “street lighting contract.” The local newspaper had published stories referring to “The Gas Monopoly” in the spring of 1875, which added to a general conflict between the city and gas company regarding the franchise renewal; the conflict

¹⁰ “The Baptist Church,” *The Progress Index*, March 13, 1867, p.3.

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was focused on rates and the slow extension of mains by the company.¹¹ The Petersburg Gas Lighting Company offered a nonnegotiable proposal regarding rates and extension of the mains, and the city council's Special Gas Committee responded by setting a cancellation of the agreement with the company and discontinuance of gas service on June 1, 1875. Additionally, the Committee set plans to advertise for bids for future gas service. On June 1, the gas service was cut off, which lasted until an agreement was reached on June 21, 1875. The final agreement gave the gas company exclusive control of street lighting at a rate of \$2.50 per M. Cu. Ft., and a rate of \$3.00 per M. Cu. Ft for individual customers, both below what the company had initially demanded. A city gas Inspector position was created to read all meters.¹²

By 1875, the outstanding capital stock of Petersburg Gas Lighting Company was \$130,000 and paid a 5% dividend. At this time, the gas works produced around 15,000,000 Cu. Ft., with a gas to coal yield higher than any other gas works in the country. This was a time of general economic expansion for Petersburg, with the Old Southern R.R. and the Weldon Railroads linking to form a loop around the city. There was also an expansion in the number of factories, roads were extended and improved, and the navigability of the Appomattox River was enhanced. However, the Electric Light Company was established in 1884 by Mr. P. Beddle and was immediate competition for the gas light service to the city. The year 1884 also saw the establishment of horse-drawn streetcar service.¹³

The capacity of the gas works in 1884 was 100,000 feet of gas per day, delivered through 16.5 miles of pipes. The company also sold coke for heating. The Petersburg Gas Lighting Company lost their franchise in 1885 and with it the entire city lighting contract. The company continued to serve a smaller market for private and business gas usage, but it was in steady decline. By 1901, the business had fallen to a level consisting of 14.25 miles of mains, 658 service meters, and 1,000,000 Cu. Ft. of gas delivered per month, with a record low price of \$2.00 per M. Cu. Ft. Additionally, the gas works plant was in substantial disrepair.¹⁴

The gas works was sold in 1901 and rechartered as The Petersburg Gas Company on March 26, 1901. Based out of Philadelphia, the new owners were R.D. Apperson, G.M. Figer, H.H. Dawson, J.T. Long, and L.G. Apperson. The new ownership began an immediate process of updating the plant's equipment and making minimal repairs to keep the gas works in effective service, while retaining the existing business. Planned improvements included extending mains, and total improvement costs were estimated at \$20,000. They also dismissed the services of Superintendent W.H. Baxter, who had served the company in some capacity since 1854 and was viewed by the community as the anchor of the gas works. The price of gas fell to \$1.60, and the company began marketing "House Piping, Fixtures, Gas Ranges..." as a way to expand their market.¹⁵

¹¹ Godwin, *Selected History Re: Gas Works*, p.7.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁴ Pollock, *Historical and Industrial Guide to Petersburg*, p.92; Godwin, *Selected History Re: Gas Works*, p.10.

¹⁵ "Gas Company Bought," *Baltimore Morning Herald*, February, 44, 1901, p.6; Godwin, *Selected History Re: Gas Works*, p.11.

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Minimal updates and maintenance seemed to have continued until a group of investors purchased the Petersburg Gas Company and merged it with The American Gas Company in early 1909. From 1909-1910, this new company began a plan to build up demand for natural gas service before rebuilding the physical gas works plant. By this time, heating was a leading source of business (with light service largely eclipsed by electricity). The General Manager and main Engineer laid out a plan in February of 1911 to revitalize the plant, including expanding the facilities. Part of this plan included purchasing the adjoining parcel of land to the south for \$17,500, and another to the east along Bank Street for \$3,750.¹⁶

A new Water Gas system was installed and brought into service on November 26, 1911. This included new boilers with a capacity of 125 horsepower, "...a new outdoor purifier, new yard connections, new meters, new exhausters, and re-filled benches..." Additionally, new mains were installed, and many older mains were replaced at a cost of \$5,000. In 1912, "a Coal Gas Condensing out-fit was installed...", benches were refilled, and a general process of upgrading the facilities was begun. By 1916, the Petersburg gas business was booming, and more expansions and updates to the physical plant were planned, along with improvements to the distribution network. Multiple factors contributed to the revitalized business for the Petersburg gas works, including a new Dupont Powder Plant in Hopewell, the city population had expanded to 40,000, and a new Appomattox Electric Car line running from Petersburg to Hopewell that had reignited the economic prospects for the City of Petersburg.¹⁷

By 1917, the Petersburg Gas Company manufactured gas, which was used for domestic purposes, predominantly heating, as well as industrial and power uses. The facility had a capacity of 800,000 cubic feet per 24 hours, with the price for lighting being \$1.15 per 1,000 cubic feet. By 1925, the company was still locally known as the Petersburg Gas Company, even though ownership had changed more than a decade earlier. Gas at this time sold at \$1.75 per M.C.F.¹⁸

Beginning in 1928, the Petersburg Gas Company operated as part of the Hopewell gas plant. As part of this change, gas mains and supply pipes were extended between the two cities. This was a clear testament to the burgeoning growth of the City of Hopewell and the expansion of residential service into the "suburbs."¹⁹ In 1933, reflecting the general decline of commodity prices, and the overall economic environment of the Great Depression, the Petersburg Gas Company lowered gas rates in Petersburg and Hopewell in "the spirit of the times."²⁰

A 1953 article in *The Progress Index* described the unappreciated quality of life improvements received from the 1,200 lights installed around the city by the Virginia Electric and Power

¹⁶ Godwin, *Selected History Re: Gas Works*, p.12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13-14.

¹⁸ LeRoy Hodges, *Petersburg Virginia Economic and Municipal* (Petersburg, VA: Chamber of Commerce of Petersburg, Inc.: 1917), p.75; Chamber of Commerce of Petersburg, VA, Inc., *Petersburg, Virginia* (Petersburg, VA: 1925), p.10.

¹⁹ "Petersburg Gas Plant Added To Gas Company Of Hopewell, Which Also Supplies Suburbs," *The Hopewell News*, February 24, 1928, p.1.

²⁰ "Saves Gas Users \$15,000 Per Year," *The Hopewell News*, March 30, 1933, p.1.

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Company. The article proceeded to discuss that, not many years earlier, the streets were illuminated by hundreds of square gas lamps. One of the last lamplighters, Toby Edwards, would walk from lamp to lamp with a ladder hand-lighting each one. But the combination of flickering and less efficient lighting led to the demise of gas lights by the early twentieth century.²¹

To bolster revenue after the loss of the lighting business, gas companies initiated programs to sell heating and cooking equipment to homeowners. This provided income from the equipment sales, and then long-term revenue from the increased use of gas. In a multitude of newspaper advertisements, The Petersburg and Hopewell Gas Company offered gas appliances that they claimed provided “faster cooking, instant heat, greater cleanliness, better temperature control, and greater economy than any other fuel or heat source.”²² They offered appliances for “cooking...water heating...clothes drying...heating...incineration...”²³

By the 1950s, as the original brick gas works building’s role in active gas production was ending, the Petersburg Gas Company building (and a now-demolished boiler addition) still featured an oil fired/peak shaving system. This system was used regularly until the early 1950s, and sporadically until the late 1960s, to fill supply gaps during periods of high demand. Additionally, there was a huge propane tank, which was drawn on to mix with natural gas for higher BTUs in the winter. Jack Britton, who first worked at the facility as “summer help” ca. 1957, remembers the boiler being attached to the north side of the building, along Washington Street, sending huge bursts of flame into the sky when it was cleaned.²⁴ After the oil/peak system stopped being used as the primary source of gas, the overall facility moved to processing natural gas. From this point on, beginning in the late 1950s, the original brick Petersburg Gas Company building was largely used for storage. Another factor that pushed the transition from manufactured to natural gas was the tremendous rise in commercial demand. The most prominent example of this was the Allied Chemical Plant in Hopewell. Initially, Allied Chemical had its own oil-fired boilers on site and manufactured its own gas supply until the 1950s, when it transitioned to natural gas. At its peak, it was claimed that the Allied Chemical plant used more natural gas than the six largest cities in Virginia combined.²⁵ Miss Josephine M. Quicke retired in 1953 as assistant secretary and treasurer after working for the company for twenty-five years. She recalled that when she started in 1928, the company was a gas manufacturing and distribution company, but by the time of her retirement, the company was a “distributor of natural gas.” During that time, the company also tripled its number of customers.²⁶

History and development of the manufactured gas industry

The use of natural gas as a fuel may date to as early as ca. 400 BC in China. However, this was limited to the use of gas near the source until the late nineteenth century, with the development

²¹ Julie Daugherty, “Street Lighting Important To Safety Of Life In City,” *The Progress Index*, April 19, 1953, p.18.

²² Advertisement, *The Progress Index*, September 27, 1953, p.26.

²³ “Good Gas Service Makes Warm Friends,” (advertisement), *The Progress Index*, September 16, 1956, p.18.

²⁴ Jack Britton (former Columbia Gas employee), interview, September 11, 2025.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Post Is Left By Miss Quicke,” *The Progress Index*, November 1, 1953, p.20.

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of long-distance pipelines. Natural gas (consisting primarily of methane) is a different product than “manufactured gas” (consisting predominantly of hydrogen, with lower amounts of methane and carbon monoxide), which is what was produced at the Petersburg Gas Company and similar facilities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The name “natural gas” was created in the early nineteenth century to differentiate it from manufactured gas, also called “coal gas.”²⁷

Manufactured gas as a product was developed independently in several locations in Europe in the late eighteenth century. William Murdoch is often credited with the establishment of the commercial use of manufactured gas in the 1790s in England. The first gas utility company was the Gas Light and Coke Company, established in London in April 1812.²⁸

Manufactured gas lighting was first established in the United States in the city of Baltimore in 1816 by Rembrandt and Rubens Peale. By 1817, they had incorporated their company and began laying mains and installing street lights. After Baltimore, in rapid succession, were Boston Gas Light (1822) and New York Gas Light Company (1825). By the 1820s, manufactured gas utilities had spread across Europe and North America. A gas works was constructed in Philadelphia in 1835.²⁹ The Norfolk Gas Light Company (in Norfolk, Virginia) was established in 1849, with street lights illuminated that same year, demonstrating that the efforts in Petersburg were following the national trendline for the adoption of gas lighting.³⁰

The Petersburg Gas Company facility was developed at a transitional phase in manufactured gas production. First, the material used for retorts changed from cast iron to fire-clay, allowing for higher heat and more effective carbonization of the coal. Second, the industry moved from “directly fired” to “indirectly fired” retort benches. This introduced compressed steam as the primary heating system and resulted in enhanced flame and heating of the retorts. Finally, heat recuperation was added to the process, which fed the retort bench exhaust back through refractory brickwork to enhance the gas manufacturing process. These and other industry improvements resulted in several generations of gas manufacturing equipment being used at the Petersburg Gas Company gas works over more than a century.³¹

The process of manufacturing gas remained largely the same from the early nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century. Coal was placed in a retort (a closed tube) housed in a “bench” and heated in a furnace in the absence of oxygen to drive off gases. The gases then passed through a hydraulic main (a water trap) into a condenser. The condenser cooled the gas and primarily served to remove tar and excess liquid. Finally, the gas moved to a purifier to remove

²⁷ “Natural Gas,” Wikipedia, Accessed September 11, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_gas#History.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Marvin W. Schlegel (edit.), *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 1962), p.133.

³¹ “Natural Gas,” Wikipedia, Accessed September 11, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_gas#History.

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impurities, primarily sulphur. After the manufacturing process was complete, the gas was then supplied to consumers or stored in a gas holder.^{32 33}

Initially, gas was almost entirely used for lighting. Small gas works would be created for single-use lighting locations, such as a mill or factory. Soon, gas was expanded to light the streets in the majority of towns and cities. It was not until the late nineteenth century that gas lighting was financially viable for a majority of private residences. The second half of the nineteenth century saw a long decline in gaslit homes in favor of electricity, which led to the industry searching for new uses for their product. The manufactured gas industry began the push for alternate uses for gas in the late nineteenth century. However, gas used for cooking or heating did not become a significant factor in the market until well into the twentieth century. Gas-powered water heaters were also not widely adopted until the twentieth century.³⁴

Criterion A: Industry

The Petersburg Gas Company building is an extraordinarily rare antebellum industrial/gas works resource. It retains substantial original elements, with repairs and alterations resulting from its direct role in the Siege of Petersburg during the Civil War. The building was constructed during the early period of manufactured gas expansion in the United States (1851) and remained in use until the mid-twentieth century. This building was in operation during the transition from manufactured gas to natural gas distribution, with only a brief interruption during repairs after the Civil War. The facility manufactured gas first for lighting, then later for domestic heating and cooking, and, finally, for commercial power. The history of this building mirrored the history of the manufactured gas industry in the United States for more than a century.

An examination of the Virginia Cultural Resource Information System (VCRIS) revealed that within the Commonwealth of Virginia, antebellum extant industrial resources are rare, and those related to gas works are extraordinarily so. While there were dozens of mills and furnaces predating the Civil War, preliminary examination revealed only 18 “factories” from the antebellum period remaining in Virginia. None of these factories is identified as a gas works, or related in any fashion to gas production or distribution, with the exception of the Petersburg Gas Company. The next oldest identified extant gas works-related resource in Virginia is the 1888 Clifton Forge Light and Gas Company (VDHR # 105-0070). With this level of rarity within Virginia, there is a strong case for the Petersburg Gas Company being eligible at a statewide level of significance.

³² “Making Gas from Coal,” National Gas Museum, Leicester, England. Accessed September 11, 2025, <https://www.nationalgasmuseum.org.uk/discover/making-gas-from-coal/>.

³³ The elaborate 1876 Petersburg Gas Light Company gas holder was extant on the site of the Petersburg Gas Company building until 1989, when it was dismantled. In 1988 a state Preliminary Information Form was completed for the gas holder, with a determination found for National Register eligibility at the national level of significance.

³⁴ Making Gas from Coal,” National Gas Museum, Leicester, England. Accessed September 11, 2025, <https://www.nationalgasmuseum.org.uk/discover/making-gas-from-coal/>.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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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 # VA-14

- The ca. 1876 Petersburg Gas Light Company Gasholder was recorded by HAER in 1971. It was located on this site until 1989, when it was dismantled.

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: City of Petersburg Library; Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR No. 123-0036

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.51

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.231806 Longitude: -77.396992

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

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Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the Petersburg Gas Company includes all of parcel 012130001 as recorded by the City of Petersburg, Virginia, and as noted in the City's real estate assessor's records. The true and correct historic boundary is shown on the attached scaled location and sketch maps.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The selected boundary for the Petersburg Gas Company is the current legal parcel boundary associated with the property. The boundary is also historically associated with the nominated property throughout the building's period of significance. The property's historic setting and all known associated historic resources have been included within the nominated area's boundary.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Marcus Pollard, Historian
organization: Commonwealth Preservation Group
street & number: 536 W 35th Street
city or town: Norfolk state: VA zip code: 23508
e-mail: marcus@commonwealthpreservationgroup.com
telephone: 757-923-1900
date: 10/10/2025

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Petersburg Gas Company

City or Vicinity: City of Petersburg

County: NA

State: VA

Photographer: Marcus Pollard

Date Photographed: February 27, 2025

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

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Exterior

1. South elevation and site, facing North
2. East elevation, facing West
3. SE oblique, facing NW
4. South elevation, "section B," facing North
5. South elevation, facing North
6. South elevation, 1980s addition, facing NE
7. West elevation, site, facing NE
8. West elevation, detail, facing East
9. West elevation, site, facing East
10. North elevation, facing SE
11. North elevation, detail, facing SE
12. North elevation, facing SW
13. North elevation, second story detail, facing South
14. NE oblique, facing SW
15. Frame, metal -lad equipment building and noncontributing natural gas converter, facing East

Interior

16. Eastern end ("section A"), facing East
17. Eastern end ("section A"), facing North
18. Eastern end ("section A"), facing SW
19. Central ("section B"), facing North
20. Central ("section B"), facing West
21. Central ("section B"), facing SW
22. Central ("section D"), facing North
23. Western end ("Section E"), facing NE
24. Stairs along south side of "Section D", leading to second story over "Section D."
25. "Section D" second story, facing NW
26. "Section D" second story, facing North
27. "Section D" second story, facing East
28. "Section D" second story, facing South
29. 1980s addition, interior central hall, facing East
30. 1980s addition, SE corner room, facing SE
31. 1980s addition, office, facing SW

Embedded Images Log

Figure No.	Caption
1	"View of Petersburg Gas Works", Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War, May 1865, A Gardner

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

Petersburg, Virginia

The Petersburg Gas Company
416-436 E Bank Street
Petersburg, Virginia
DHR ID# 123-0036

 The Petersburg Gas Company
Resource Boundary

Location Coordinates:
1) Latitude: 37.231806
Longitude: -77.396992



Feet
0 50 100 150 200
1:2,257 / 1"=188 Feet

Title: The Petersburg Gas Company (DHR ID# 123-0036) | Location Map

Date:9/19/2025

DISCLAIMER: This drawing is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as such. The information displayed is a compilation of records, information, and data obtained from various sources, and City of Petersburg is not responsible for its accuracy or how current it may be.

Petersburg, Virginia

The Petersburg Gas Company
416-436 E Bank Street
Petersburg, Virginia
DHR ID# 123-0036

 The Petersburg Gas Company Resource Boundary

Parcel Number: 012130001

C = Contributing

NC = Non-Contributing

Modern drop-in resources are not counted as secondary resources.



Feet
0 25 50 75 100
1:1,128 / 1"=94 Feet

Title: The Petersburg Gas Company (DHR ID# 123-0036) | Sketch Map

Date:9/19/2025

DISCLAIMER: This drawing is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as such. The information displayed is a compilation of records, information, and data obtained from various sources, and City of Petersburg is not responsible for its accuracy or how current it may be.

Petersburg, Virginia

The Petersburg Gas Company
416-436 E Bank Street
Petersburg, Virginia
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 The Petersburg Gas Company Resource Boundary

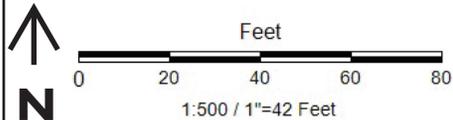
 Photo Location and View Direction



Title: The Petersburg Gas Company (DHR ID# 123-0036) | Photo Key

Date: 9/19/2025

DISCLAIMER: This drawing is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as such. The information displayed is a compilation of records, information, and data obtained from various sources, and City of Petersburg is not responsible for its accuracy or how current it may be.





Petersburg Gas Company Building Sections

DHR ID# 123-0036

416-436 E Bank Street

Petersburg, Virginia