FORM A - AREA

Assessor's Sheets	USGS Quad	Area Letter	Form Numbers in Area
See Data Sheet	Marion	MRN. AI	See Data Sheet

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Photograph

Town/City: Marion

Place *(neighborhood or village)*: Marion Village

Name of Area: Marconi-RCA Wireless Station

Present Use: Residential / Commercial

Construction Dates or Period: 1914-1920

Overall Condition: Good

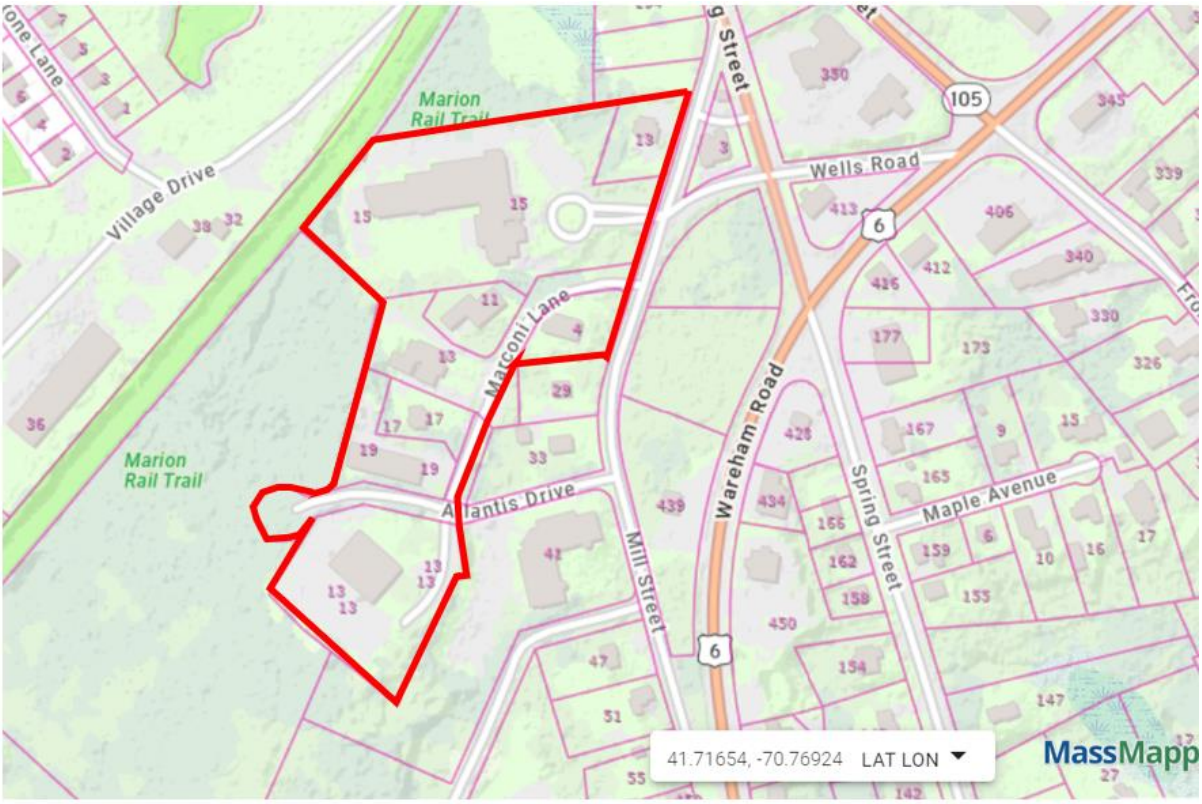
Major Intrusions and Alterations: None

Acreage: 5.05

Recorded by: Lynn Smiledge

Organization: Marion Historical Commission

Date *(month/year):* February 2023



☐ *see continuation sheet*

☒ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

INTRODUCTION

Located in the northwestern portion of Marion Village, the Marconi-RCA Wireless Station Area (MRN.AI) includes five contributing buildings, a transmission tower, and surrounding land which comprised a portion of the Marconi-RCA wireless telegraph transmitting station. It is situated on the west side of Mill Street between Route 6A to the east and the Marion Rail Trail to the west and incorporates two streets, Marconi Lane and Atlantis Drive. The Marion facility was one of a number of such stations established by the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America to provide transoceanic communication using radio waves and to directly compete with earlier underwater cable telegraphy. This facility operated from 1914 until it was decommissioned in 1956. The buildings today support both residential and commercial use.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The five buildings at the Marconi-RCA Wireless Station include three one-and one-half-story residences, a two-story former employee hotel, and a two-story former power house now used as a warehouse. The buildings retain their original sites and orientations, illustrating the functional relationships between them when the wireless station was operational. (See Figure 1.) The employee hotel is constructed of brick and although significantly altered, retains much of its Craftsman-style character. The complete replacement of the envelope at the power house has compromised the building's architectural integrity, although the structure's original form and massing remains unchanged. The superintendent's house, a brick bungalow, retains its original architectural interest and character. The two wood-frame cottages are intact and are fine examples of the Colonial Revival style.

13 Atlantis Drive (1914, Marconi Station Power House, MRN.572)
The former power house is an approximately 16,400 SF, two-story, six-bay-by-five-bay structure with a flat tar-and-gravel roof and a rectangular plan. The building is set back from the intersection of Atlantis Drive and Marconi Lane and faces east. Its original brick exterior and Craftsman-style brickwork detailing has been encased within a shell of stucco panels, and its monumental industrial windows have been replaced by small, narrow, double-hung, one-over-one sash. (See Figures 2 and 3.) These alterations to the envelope probably date to the 1970s according to the current building owner. A shallow parapet with crenellations encircles the cornice and a pair of tall eave-wall chimneys is centered at the façade (east elevation); these features are also covered with stucco. There is a large loading dock at the rear (north) elevation. A single entry with a Colonial Revival-style door surround occupies the southernmost bay at the facade. The building interior is still essentially intact and includes the original steel staircases and an overhead crane used for moving the generators and other equipment. The building is currently used for the storage of antique furniture and artifacts.

4 Marconi Lane (1914, Marconi Station Superintendent's Cottage, MRN.573)
This charming one-story brick dwelling is a bungalow, a subtype of the Craftsman style. It is side-gabled with its façade facing north. The seven-bay-by-three-bay house has a rectangular plan and rests on a brick foundation. The shallow hipped roof has deep eaves and dormers at each roof slope – shallow shed dormers at the north and south slopes and gabled dormers at the east and west slopes. The dormers and roof surfaces are clad with asphalt shingles, which replaced red tiles or slates seen in an early photograph of the house. (See Figure 4.) The shed dormers contain triple wooden casement windows and the gabled dormers have vents. Fenestration at the easternmost three bays at the façade comprises three large, six-light metal windows with integrated three-light transoms; the westernmost of these has been altered to contain an entry accessed by a brick stair with high brick flank walls. Matching metal windows occupy the east elevation. The four easternmost bays at the façade, and the windows at the south and west elevations, contain wooden six-over-one sash.

11 Marconi Lane (ca. 1920, Marconi Station North Cottage, MRN.574) **and 17 Marconi Lane** (ca. 1920, Marconi Station North Cottage, MRN.567)
These cottages, which flank the former employee hotel building and face east, were built to the same plan and despite small alterations to each, are essentially identical. Each house is a one-and-one-half story, three-bay-by-two-bay, side-gabled dwelling with a centered, pedimented entrance portico. It rises from a high brick foundation and is clad with wood and/or asphalt shingles and wood trim. A large, off-center brick chimney occupies the ridge at the roof, which is surfaced with asphalt shingles. Trim elements include deep eaves, box cornices, frieze boards, and eave returns. The main entry, which is located above grade and opens to a brick porch sheltered by the open portico, contains a paneled door with full-height sidelights. The entablature at the portico is embellished with modillions and supported by paired, square Doric columns. The windows at the house are double-hung, eight-over-eight sash with molded surrounds. A large, two-bay-by-six bay, L-shaped barn was built in 1996 and connected to the north elevation of the house.

13 Marconi Lane (1914, Marconi Station Employee Hotel, MRN.575)
The former employee hotel comprises an original two-story, side-gabled, five-bay-by-three-bay, hip-roofed rectangular main block with three dependencies. The dependencies include a centered projection at the façade (east elevation), a two-story perpendicular brick wing with a shed-roofed dormer at the northeast elevation, and a one-story standing-seam metal infill addition between the main block and the north wing. The building is brick with wood, vinyl, and concrete trim elements. Early photographs of this Craftsman-style building show it with a full-width integrated open porch at the façade (east elevation) which has since been enclosed; some of the original brick porch piers and their decorative concrete caps are extant. (See Figures 5 and 6.)

The main block sits on a concrete foundation with the bricks starting at grade. A brick chimney rises from the north roof slope at the north wing. The asphalt-shingled roof has deep overhanging eaves with vinyl-covered soffits; an early photograph of the building shows the building with a red tile or slate roof. The main entry is located in the south wall of a pedimented, cross-gabled brick addition centered at the façade that appears to have been added in the mid-20th century. It repeats the masonry embellishments of the main block and has small oculus windows at the second story on the north and south elevations; the tympanum is clad with wood shingles. The windows at the main block are recessed double-hung, eight-over-eight sash with concrete sills. Openings at the dependencies are primarily six-over-six and eight-over eight windows.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America (commonly known as American Marconi) was formed in 1899 as a subsidiary of the British Marconi Company. The parent company had been founded by radio pioneer Guglielmo Giovanni Maria Marconi (1874-1937), who was born to a noble family in Bologna, Italy. He had no formal university education but rather studied the principals of physics with a series of private tutors and attended lectures at the University of Bologna. While there was a great deal of interest in the scientific community in the late 19th century in the phenomenon of radio waves, it was Marconi who saw a practical application for their use in wireless communication. Beginning his experiments by conducting radio waves for only a few feet, he was soon transmitting them for much longer distances. In 1896 at the age of 25 he travelled to Britain to pursue funding for his ideas and was quickly granted a British patent for his concepts and equipment. With funding in hand, Marconi rapidly stretched distances between transmitter and receiver to miles, and then to hundreds of miles. In 1901 he built a transmission station in South Wellfleet on Cape Cod where in 1903 a message was transmitted from President Theodore Roosevelt to King Edward the VI in England. For his pioneering work, Marconi received scores of awards and honors including the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1909.

Being cheaper and easier to maintain, this new wireless transoceanic communication technology soon eclipsed the use of undersea cables. The Marion station was built to replace the original 1902 Marconi station in South Wellfleet, where there was serious and well-founded concern about the erosion of land surrounding the station. The Marion site was selected because of the stability of the topography and the clear transmission path across the Atlantic Ocean. Coupled with a

facility in Chatham which served as the receiving station for inbound messages, the Marion Station provided point-to-point transmission of wireless communications between the United States and a facility in Stavanger, Norway. The sending and receiving stations communicated via land-based telegraphy. When it opened in 1914, the Marion site encompassed 144 acres of land, five buildings, and fourteen 400-foot tubular steel masts (guyed towers) arrayed in a rectangle whose long side was almost a mile long stretching west from Mill Street. The land for this facility was acquired by the Marconi Company early in 1914 and consisted of several parcels of farmland, the largest of which comprised 119 acres originally owned by George D. Allen, Ebenezer Holmes, and Richard W. Clark.

The facilities at Marion and Chatham, as well as one in Marshfield, were designed and built by the J.G. White Engineering Corporation, an international engineering and consulting company headquartered in New York, New York. Their work at the Marion station included the engineering and construction of the steam-electric power plants, the steel wireless masts (towers), and the hotel and residential buildings. The Marion and Chatham projects appear to have been done contemporaneously and took advantage of a unified design for many elements of the project, including the employee hotels and residences for each location which are essentially identical. J.G. White Engineering Corporation also constructed wireless stations in New Brunswick and Belmar, New Jersey; the Sandwich Islands; Bolinas and Tomales Bay, California; and the Hawaiian Islands.[1]

The J.G. White Company, the predecessor to the J.G. White Engineering Corporation, was a contracting firm founded in 1890 by James Gilbert White. An engineer, contractor, and investment banker, White was born in 1861 and attended Pennsylvania State University and then Cornell University, where he received a Ph.D. in electrical engineering and physics. His company grew and White expanded the business, organizing the J.G. White Engineering Corporation in New York in 1913. The J.G. White Engineering Corporation was responsible for many large engineering and construction projects in the United States and internationally. White's first success in the United States was the construction of the Buffalo-Niagara Falls Electric Railway, the first high-speed inter-urban line in America. Although White formed a construction company in London that built the Ritz and Waldorf Hotels and Selfridge's department stores, the only buildings that the company constructed in the United States were those associated with its engineering projects. The president of the J.G. White Engineering Corporation when the Marion and Chatham projects were undertaken was Gano Dunn (1870-1953), the recipient of the first degree in electrical engineering granted by Columbia University.[2]

While more research would be required to shed light on the staffing and day-to-day operations of the Marion station, the Chatham station, of roughly the same size, offers a reasonable model. It employed a staff of 30 employees including telegraphers, maintenance staff, riggers, machinists and administrative staff. The Chatham facility operated 24 hours a day handling up to 1,000 messages daily. [3]

At the start of World War I, control of the Marion station was assumed by the United States Navy. In 1920, because of concerns about this strategic communications operation being controlled by a foreign business entity (the British Marconi Company), and with the encouragement of the U.S. government, American Marconi was acquired by the Radio Corporation of America. The Radio Corporation of America (RCA), which did not become an independent company until 1932, was founded in 1919 as a joint venture of General Electric (G.E.), Westinghouse, American Telephone & Telegraph, and United Fruit Company. In 1924 RCA shifted point-to-point communication operations to a facility on Long Island, New York. The Long Island station used the Marion-Chatham sister operation solely for communications with ships at sea and the latter became the largest maritime transmitter in the world. To support operations, in 1927 RCA added three 245-foot, self-supporting, pyramidal towers to the Marion site. Maritime communication operations were eventually consolidated, with both transmitting and receiving facilities in Chatham. During World War II the Marion station was again taken over by the United States military. The Marion operation was no longer involved in maritime (ship-to-shore) communications, but the facility's ultra-low frequency transmission could penetrate deep into seawater, giving the station

[1] *Achievements of the J.G. White Engineering Corporation and Associates in America and Foreign Fields,* New York: J.G. White Engineering Corp., 1920s.
[2] "Marconi-RCA Receiving Station, Chatham, Massachusetts," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, April 1994.
[3] Ibid.

a vital role in radio communications with submarines. The complex was sold by RCA to the United States government in 1951 and was used by the United States Air Force until 1956.[4]

By 1960 the Marion station had been deemed obsolete by the military and all of the original masts and several later towers were taken down.[5] The entire property was purchased in 1960 by Eldon Love, the owner of the Marion Lumber Company.[6] Over the next decade, he subdivided and sold the property on which the original five Marconi-RCA buildings and one extant tower were sited. The majority of the original 144 acres of land comprising the station were donated to the Sippican Lands Trust in 1986. Scattered remnants of equipment remain on this mostly-wooded conservation land, including guy wires, concrete mast footings, and cables. The single remaining RCA-built tower (MRN.936) is sited just off Mill Street at the northeast corner of the area. It is owned by Mediaone and serves as a cell tower.

13 Atlantis Drive (1914, Marconi Station Power House, MRN.572)
This large brick structure, now enclosed within a stucco envelope, was variously called the power house, radio building, or tower building. (See Figures 2 and 3.) It housed the equipment that generated the enormous pulses of electric current necessary to transmit the radio signals, which were directed by the array of towers, across the Atlantic Ocean. The original Marconi generators were replaced by RCA in 1920 by two high-powered Alexanderson alternator transmitters made by General Electric. The Marion Station was among the first to install these new power plants, although this advanced technology was soon rendered obsolete.

Five years after its purchase in 1960, Eldon Love and the Marion Lumber Company sold the building to the Braincon Corporation, a Marion-based company which developed sophisticated oceanographic instruments.[7] The company had been founded in 1959 by Tabor Academy graduate Edward C. Brainard II. In 1975 the building was acquired by the Environmental Devices Company, later known as Endeco, Inc., manufacturers of marine environmental monitoring devices.[8] Endeco, Inc. became a subsidiary of YSI, Inc., which in 2011 donated the building to the Town of Marion. The Town held the property and used it for storage until 2020, when it was purchased by the current owner. The building now serves as a storage facility for antiques.

4 Marconi Lane (1914, Marconi Station Superintendent's Cottage, MRN.573)
This brick bungalow served as the residence for the station superintendent or engineer-in-charge. (See Figure 4.) In 1943 the New Bedford *Standard Times* reported the departure of the current occupant of the cottage, Clyde Backus.[9] Backus served as the engineer-in-charge at the Marion station for RCA from 1930 until 1943. Prior to coming to the Marion facility, he had worked at the Rock Point, Long Island RCA station. Eldon Love of the Marion Lumber Company sold the superintendent's cottage to Nelson M. and Violet L. Adams in 1963. Nelson Morgan Adams, Jr. (1926-2001) was born in New Hampshire, the son of farmer Nelson Morgan Adams and Ruth Buller. He was married to Violet L. Gibbs (1926-2021), the daughter of Thornton Delano Gibbs and Violet May Bennet of Marion and a graduate of Wareham High School. Nelson M. Adams, Jr. served in the United States Navy during World War II. The 1950 census reported his occupation as gardener at a private estate and his wife Violet's as clerk in a retail pharmacy. The property remains in Adams family ownership.

11 Marconi Lane (ca. 1920, Marconi Station North Cottage, MRN.574)
This dwelling was one of two wood frame cottages on the station property, as seen flanking a brick building labeled "employees" on the 1933 Sanborn map. (See Figure 6.) The cottages appear to have been built in the early 1920s during the period of ownership by RCA and were occupied by married station personnel. Eldon Love sold this cottage to Edward C. Brainard II in 1970 along with the properties at 13 Marconi Lane and 17 Marconi Lane. As described above, Brainard

[4] "Air Force Explains Request to Buy Marion RCA Facility," *The Standard-Times,* New Bedford, MA, July 21.1949.
[5] "Marion Wireless Masts, Built in '14 Taken Down." *The Standard-Times,* New Bedford, MA, August 2, 1960.
[6] "Marion, City Firms Enter Land Bids," *The Standard-Times,* New Bedford, MA, April 23, 1960.
[7] "Oceanic Firm Defies Tides," *The Boston Globe,* Boston, MA, September 11, 1976.
[8] "Boston Harbor oxygen levels low," *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, October 19, 1978.
[9] "Radio Manager Has New Post," *The Standard-Times,* New Bedford, December 17, 1943.

was the founder of the Braincon Corporation which had purchased the Marconi Station power house building at 13 Atlantis Avenue five years earlier in 1965. Brainard sold the cottage in 1975 and after two subsequent corporate owners, it was purchased in 1984 by Kathleen Feeney. It was acquired by the current owner in 1996.

13 Marconi Lane (1914, Marconi Station Employee Hotel, MRN.575)
This building, commonly referred to as the "hotel," served as a residence for unmarried staff at the station. (See Figures 5 and 6.) It is not known if the building continued to be used for the same purpose after the facility was sold by RCA to the United States Government in 1951. It was purchased by Edward C. Brainard II in 1970 along with the cottages at 11 Marconi Lane and 17 Marconi Lane. Brainard sold the building in 1975 and after four subsequent corporate owners it was acquired in 2017 by Quinlan Brothers, LLC. It currently serves as a commercial office building.

17 Marconi Lane (ca. 1920, Marconi Station South Cottage, MRN.567)
This dwelling was one of the two wood frame cottages occupied by married personnel. (See Figure 6.) Eldon Love sold this cottage to Edward C. Brainard II in 1970 along with the properties at 13 Marconi Lane and 17 Marconi Lane. As described above, Brainard was the founder of the Braincon Corporation which had purchased the Marconi Station power house building at 13 Atlantis Avenue in 1965. Brainard sold the cottage in 1975 and after two subsequent corporate owners, it was purchased in 1985 by W. Bruce and Rebecca J. Tamlyn. The cottage was sold to its current owners in 2009.

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DATA SHEET

Photograph	Historic Name Arch. Style / Form	Address	Parcel #	Date	MHC #	Image #
	**Power House** No Style	**13 Atlantis Drive**	**24-13F**	**1914**	**MRN.572**	**1**
	**Superintendent's Cottage** Craftsman	**4 Marconi Lane**	**24-13A**	**1921**	**MRN.573**	**2**
	**North Cottage** Colonial Revival	**11 Marconi Lane**	**24-13P**	**1920**	**MRN.574**	**3**
	**Employee Hotel** Craftsman	**13 Marconi Lane**	**24-13J**	**1914**	**MRN.575**	**4**
	**South Cottage** Colonial Revival	**17 Marconi Lane**	**24-13U**	**1920**	**MRN.567**	**5**
	**Commercial Bldg.** No Style	**19 Marconi Lane**	**24-13V**	**1996**	**MRN.568**	**6**

Photograph	Historic Name Arch. Style / Form	Address	Parcel #	Date	MHC #	Image #
	**Radio Tower**	**13 Mill Street**	**24-13M**	**1927**	**MRN.937**	
	**Health Care Center** Contemporary	**15 Mill Street**	**24-13G**	**1989**	**MRN.571**	

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1. 13 Atlantis Drive, Power House. South and east (façade) elevations.

Photo 2. 4 Marconi Lane, Superintendent's Cottage. East and north (façade) elevations.

Photo 3. 11 Marconi Lane, North Cottage. East elevation, attached barn at right.

Photo 4. 13 Marconi Lane, Employee Hotel. South and east (façade) elevations.

Photo 5. 17 Marconi Lane, South Cottage. East elevation.

FIGURES

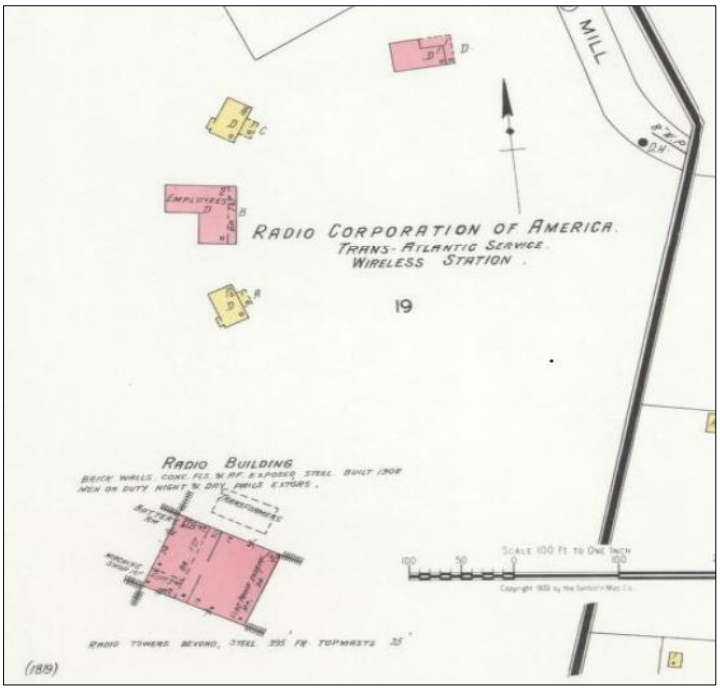

Figure 1. Sanborn Map Company fire Insurance map, April 1933.

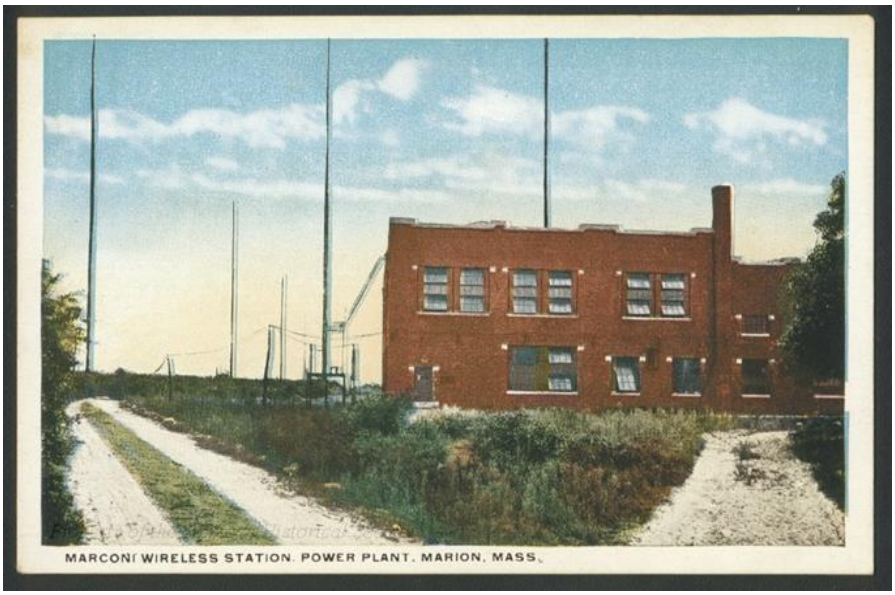

Figure 2. Marconi Wireless Station Power Plant and masts, Ca. 1914–1926. Photograph courtesy of the Sippican Historical Society.

Figure 3. Power House at the RCA-Marconi Station. Photograph courtesy of the Sippican Historical Society. Undated.

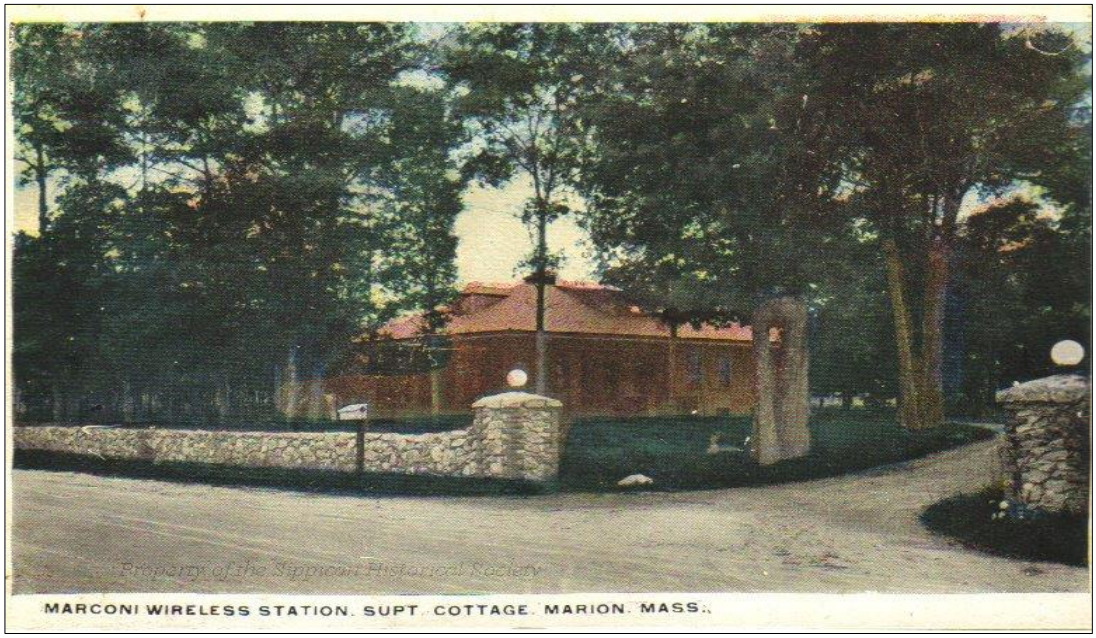

Figure 4. Superintendent's Cottage, ca. 1914. Photograph courtesy of the Sippican Historical Society.

Figure 5. Employee Hotel, ca. 1914. Photograph courtesy of the Sippican Historical Society.

Figure 6. Employee Hotel at center and 11 Marconi Lane (North Cottage) on right. Ca.1927–1960. Photograph courtesy of the Sippican Historical Society.

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

☐ Individually eligible ☐ Eligible **only** in a historic district

☐ Contributing to a potential historic district ☒ Potential historic district

Criteria: ☒ **A** ☐ **B** ☒ **C** ☐ **D**

Criteria Considerations: ☐ **A** ☐ **B** ☐ **C** ☐ **D** ☐ **E** ☐ **F** ☐ **G**

Statement of Significance by Lynn Smiledge

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The Marconi-RCA Wireless Station Area (MRN.AI) is recommended as eligible for listing as a National Register District at the local, state, and national levels under Criterion A for Social History and Criterion C for Architecture. The Marion facility was one of a number of such stations established by the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America to provide transoceanic communication using radio waves and to directly compete with earlier underwater cable telegraphy. The Marion Station was established in 1914 and operated until it was decommissioned in 1956. This small area, which comprises six contributing buildings and a single extant radio tower, is situated on the west side of Mill Street between Route 6A to the east and the Marion Rail Trail to the west and incorporates two streets, Marconi Lane and Atlantis Drive.

Under Criterion A, the area is recommended as eligible at the local, state and national level for its long and distinguished role in the history of wireless communication, particularly in ship-to-shore communications. In the mid-1920s the Marion Station was the largest maritime transmitter in the world. While during World War II the Marion Station was no longer involved in ship-to-shore communications, it played a vital military role providing ultra-low frequency undersea radio communications with submarines.

Under Criterion C, the area is recommended as eligible at the local, state and national levels in the area of Architecture for its nearly intact collection of industrial and residential buildings in the Craftsman and Colonial Revival styles. The Employee Hotel at 13 Marconi Lane (1914, MRN.566) and the Superintendent's Cottage at 4 Marconi Lane (1914, MRN.564) are distinctive examples of the Craftsman style.

The majority of the resources here retain substantial integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, design, feeling, and association. The district would likely meet criteria A and C at the local, state and national levels, with areas of significance in social history and architecture.