

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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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 Mechanicsburg Commercial Historic District

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number Main Street from Arch Street to High Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Mechanicsburg N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania

code 42

county Cumberland

code 041

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A being considered	<input checked="" 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 Multiple Ownership (See attached)

street & number

city, town N/A vicinity of

state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cumberland County Court House

street & number 5 South Hanover Street

city, town Carlisle

state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A

state N/A

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Mechanicsburg Commercial Historic District is the central business area in Mechanicsburg. It is a three block section of Main Street, which is the primary east-west route in the borough. Settled in the early nineteenth century, the original buildings were small, one and one-half or two and one-half story, gable roof, Georgian houses of frame, log or brick, set back from the street. Generally, these early buildings were altered or replaced in the mid-to-late nineteenth century by the three, four and five bay, two or three story, brick, Italianate buildings that characterize downtown Mechanicsburg today. Built as residences and commercial establishments, these later structures retain many of their original architectural details; lintels, sills, cornices, brackets, and storefronts. The district is densely built. The buildings abut the sidewalk and are close together or attached. Of the 102 buildings in the district (not including outbuildings), 11 are intrusions because of age or inappropriate alteration, 18 are individually significant, and 73 are contributing. In the district are included two churches, two banks, two fire companies and the police department. The balance of the buildings are stores and residences. The district maintains a high degree of integrity. Where there are alterations, they generally involve the storefront only.

The prevailing style of architecture in Mechanicsburg during the first half of the nineteenth century was Georgian. The buildings were generally constructed with the gable ends parallel to the street, with three, four or five bays, modest cornices and brackets, and six-over-six lights. According to Professor D. Rupp in 1845 there were "133 houses... 41 of brick, 67 of frame and 25 plastered". Although most of the 133 buildings that are in the district have either been demolished or altered, several good examples of early construction are still extant. 25 East Main Street (#92) is a rare, frame house with some log construction visible in the rear. 110 West Main Street (#54), 71 West Main Street (#33) and 73 West Main Street (#34) share architectural details common to the early buildings.

Frequently, the brick Georgian buildings were enlarged to three storys. 1-3 East Main Street (#87) was altered and modernized in 1858. This pattern continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The roofs of 7-11 West Main Street (#16) and 39 West Main Street (#23) were raised in the twentieth century.

Bridgens' Map reveals that most of the central section of Mechanicsburg had been developed by 1858. There were few vacant lots. Most subsequent construction was either replacement of early frame houses or enlargement of the sturdier brick structures.

By the eighteen fifties, the Italianate style had replaced Georgian as the favored architecture on Main Street. For the rest of the century and into the twentieth century, most new buildings were constructed in this style. Italianate became the most enduring form of architecture in Mechanicsburg and one-half of the buildings in the district are of Italianate derivation.

The economic prosperity in Mechanicsburg in the 1850's is reflected in the buildings of the period. Commonly three bay, three story structures, these buildings had simple lintels, straight freizes and multiple brackets. Constructed of local brick, they incorporate fine craftsmanship, material and design. Notable examples of this style are 59 West Main Street (#28), 27 East Main Street (#93) and 39 East Main Street (#96).

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In the late 1860's and 1870's, after the economy had recovered from the Civil War, the architecture became somewhat more sophisticated. It was during this period, C. 1868, that Mechanicsburg's three major hotels (The Merchants, the National and the American) were built. These later buildings are possibly influenced by the architecture of Franklin Hall (now demolished) which was built by prominent local architect/builder John W. Hershman in 1866. These large, commercial buildings characteristically had pedimented window headers and elaborate brackets and cornices. 48-50 West Main Street (#66), 17 West Main Street (#18), 100-104 West Main Street (#56) and 63 West Main Street (#30) share similar architectural features.

Italianate architecture was never abandoned in Mechanicsburg and was reflected in several notable commercial buildings constructed at the turn of the twentieth century. 106-108 West Main Street (#55), 26-28 West Main Street (#73) and 15-19 East Main Street (#90) are important, large scale structures with Italianate features.

Although three-quarters of the buildings in the district are either of Italianate or Georgian influence, eleven of the remaining buildings are fine examples of other late nineteenth century architecture. Significant among the eleven are 55 West Main Street (#27) and 36 West Main Street (#70), two outstanding Romanesque buildings, 38 West Main Street (#69), a fine Second Empire structure, and 55 West Main Street (#99), an excellent Queen Anne house. These later buildings are situated at intervals within the district rather than clustered in one area.

Several of the buildings retain their early storefronts. 36 East Main Street (#7), 47-49 West Main Street (#25), 71 West Main Street (#33), and 12-14 North Market Street (#86) are notable for excellent architectural details that remain: dentils, modillions, brackets and cornices, and early glass. 41-43 West Main Street (#24) has a fine, formed composition and glass facade and 17 West Main Street (#18) has an excellent art-deco first floor facade. Close inspection of the commercial buildings reveals that early storefronts often lie behind contemporary alterations.

There are only eleven intrusions in the district. Seven are on Main Street and four are on the side streets toward the rear of the blocks. Four have two or three stories as is usual in Mechanicsburg, but seven are small scale, one story structures. Eight are built of brick, to conform with the prevalent building material in the district. The intrusions generally are so located that they do not detract from the surrounding buildings.

Seventy nine percent of the buildings that are not considered intrusive are either unaltered or altered on the first floor only. The second and third floors are usually not altered. There is, consequently, a high degree of integrity within the district, and the late nineteenth century streetscape has been well preserved.

The 1890's was a period of optimism and growth in the borough, which encouraged R. H. Thomas, editor of the Independent Journal, to publish an Industrial Edition on August 2, 1893, to endorse the special opportunities in Mechanicsburg. As it was in 1893, Mechanicsburg can still be considered "The Gem City of the Famed Cumberland Valley".

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates N/A Builder/Architect Various

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Mechanicsburg was founded in the early nineteenth century by men who settled in the area and serviced the wagons that traveled west through the Great Valley. Because of its location, at the junction of two major east-west Cumberland County roads and because the Cumberland Valley Railroad was extended to Mechanicsburg in 1837, the borough became an important commercial center in the county by the middle of the nineteenth century. The Mechanicsburg Commercial Historic District reflects the economic growth and prosperity of the borough and the district survives as an excellent example of provincial commercial development of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In the late eighteenth century, settlement was begun directly to the west of Mechanicsburg at Trindle Springs. The availability of water and the fine grazing land made the site an attractive stopping point for drovers on their way to eastern cattle markets. In the early 1800's, westward migration increased along the new roads from the crossings of the Susquehanna River at Harris' Ferry (Harrisburg) and Simpson's Ferry. The influx of travelers created a demand for artisans and mechanics to repair and build wagons. The area was alternately called Pinchgut, Drytown, Stoufferstown and Mechanicsburg. The contribution of the mechanics was recognized in 1828 when the borough was incorporated as Mechanicsburg.

Henry Stouffer was one of several landowners in the borough who tried to subdivide and develop their property in the early decades of the nineteenth century. He laid out lots in the central part of the borough, the intersection of Main and Market Streets in the 1820's. By standardizing lot sizes, 200 feet in depth by 50 feet in width (later subdivided to 25 feet), and by setting geographic boundaries, Stouffer Alley to Strawberry Alley, Stouffer set the guidelines for future development of the downtown section.

By mid-century, Mechanicsburg had become a commercial community as well as a settlement of mechanics. Located midway between Harrisburg and Carlisle in eastern Cumberland County, Mechanicsburg not only served the on-road travelers who had historically utilized its facilities but also the growing number of commercial transients who were brought by the Cumberland Valley Railroad. The smaller, neighboring communities and rural areas also relied on the borough to provide shopping services.

The 1850's was a period of tremendous growth in the borough. The population more than doubled and many business firms were established during that decade. Grocery, hardware, dry goods, drug stores, specialty shops and the first local bank were joined by newly established cultural, religious and public institutions.

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Mechanicsburg's reputation as a transportation center continued to grow. New transportation related industries were founded and wagon and carriage manufacturing companies became major employers. By the time of the Civil War, Mechanicsburg had emerged as a very desirable place to live and work. Throughout the nineteenth century, it continued to attract merchants and manufacturing entrepreneurs. It cannot be stated with certainty why the commercial area did not continue to develop in the twentieth century. However, it can be presumed that the borough's economy, based largely on the manufacture and repair of wagons and carriages, was affected by the growth of the automotive industry which rendered the wagon obsolete. This economic factor and the general conservatism of the area in general may account for the lack of change and the infrequency of intrusions in the commercial district.

In the 1850's and 1860's, the new merchants and businessmen most frequently chose to build their residences and storerooms on Main Street, the heart of the commercial area. The buildings incorporated a residence for the merchant and a storeroom for his business. The structures generally were attached, three story, three bay, and built of brick in the Italianate style. Since brick was locally plentiful, it was the favored building material and eighty one percent of all structures in the district are of brick. This architectural style, scale, and building material is characteristic of the district. The later Italianate buildings are often larger in scale, but still follow the same architectural pattern of the earlier buildings. Although modest and restrained compared to their urban counterparts, the buildings in the Mechanicsburg Commercial Historic District have in common rich and varied architectural details. Elaborate cornices and brackets, detailed entryways, doors and window headers, a variety of moldings, and fine, early storefronts are typical in the district. The intrusions are scattered throughout the three block area but do not detract from the character of the district.

Despite business competition from nearby shopping malls, the Mechanicsburg Commercial Historic District remains a viable commercial center and still provides the shopping services that it has historically. The current operation of Eckel's Pharmacy (est. 1879), Biddle's Department Store (est. 1867), Weber's Hardware (est. C. 1855), Daniels' Pharmacy (est. C. 1850) and the Ryan Store (est. C. 1910), attest to the commercial continuity in the borough. The district continues to reflect Mechanicsburg's most prosperous commercial period.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property 16.67

Quadrangle name Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	3	29	2	4	0	4	45	3	26	0
Zone	Easting			Northing							

B

1	8	3	29	2	9	0	4	45	3	1	40
Zone	Easting			Northing							

C

1	8	3	28	7	9	0	4	45	2	96	0
Zone	Easting			Northing							

D

1	8	3	28	7	5	0	4	45	3	1	00
Zone	Easting			Northing							

E

Zone	Easting			Northing							

F

Zone	Easting			Northing							

G

Zone	Easting			Northing							

H

Zone	Easting			Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

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

state	code	county	code
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan G. Lott, Survey Director

organization Mechanicsburg Landmarks and Preservation Committee

date 1983

street & number 7 West Strawberry Alley

telephone (717) 766-3596

city or town Mechanicsburg

state Pennsylvania

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 Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer date 3/16/83

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

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National Park Service

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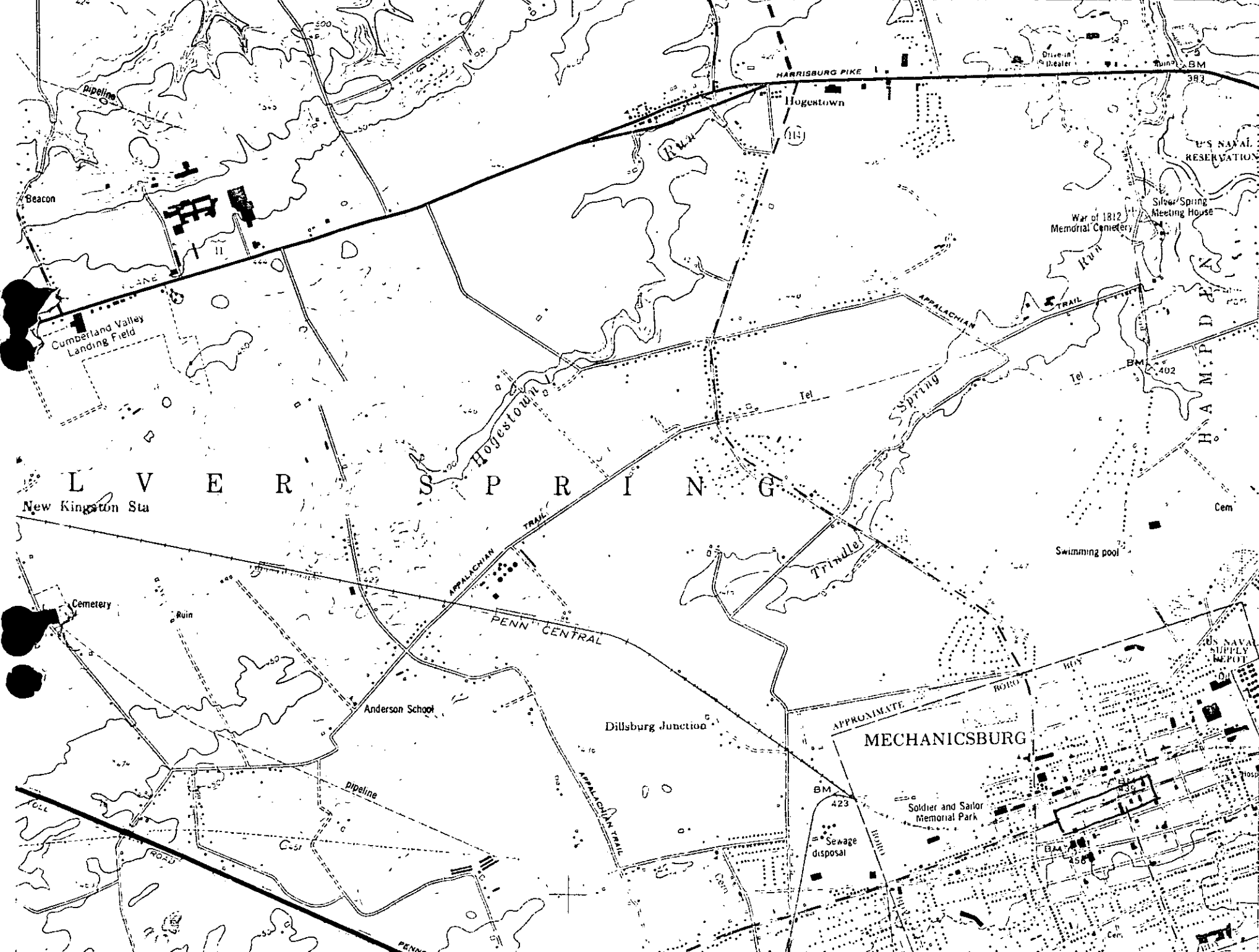
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Pipeline

Beacon

Cumberland Valley
Landing Field

HARRISBURG PIKE

Hogestown

119

War of 1812
Memorial Cemetery

Silver Spring
Meeting House

U.S. NAVAL
RESERVATION

HAMPDEN

LEVERSPRING

New Kingston Sta

Tel

Tel

BM 402

Cem

Swimming pool

Cemetery

Ruin

APPALACHIAN TRAIL

PENN CENTRAL

Trindle

Anderson School

Dillsburg Junction

MECHANICSBURG

BM 423

Soldier and Sailor
Memorial Park

Sewage
disposal

BM 456

U.S. NAVAL
SUPPLY
WEPOT

COLL

ROAD

PENNSYLVANIA

ROAD