

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Bindley Hardware Company Building

and or common J.A. Williams Company

2. Location

street & number 401 Amberson Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Pittsburgh vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 042 county Allegheny code 003

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name J. A. Williams Company

street & number 401 Amberson Avenue

city, town Pittsburgh vicinity of state Pennsylvania

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds

street & number Allegheny County Courthouse Annex, Ross Street

city, town Pittsburgh state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

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

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

Looming up on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad amidst the gracious houses of the fashionable Pittsburgh suburb of Shadyside is the John Bindley Hardware Company. The building stands on an irregularly-shaped property whose principal attraction was its proximity to the railroad on the north, and to Amberson Avenue on the west which provided access for road-based delivery systems - first the wagon, and then the truck. The configuration of the property, its access to roads and the railroad determined the use of the site. The principal facade facing Amberson Avenue has its main entrance near the railroad, across the street from the Shadyside Station. The north facade paralleling the railroad opened onto a siding that brought railroad cars directly up to the side of the building for ease of loading. The freight station was directly across from the siding, suggesting another reason for the building's location. The open space left at the south end was infilled with garages for the trucks and delivery wagons that were, according to The East End (1907), a publication of the Pittsburgh Board of Trade, "a familiar sight in the East End".

For its depot, the Bindley Hardware Company erected an immense three-story brick building, that even now is visibly impressive. Though the site is not square, the building is treated as a rectangle that simply is cut off on the diagonal where the property ended. That solution more fully exploited the available land area, while permitting the builder/owner to build along a rational column grid that insured economies of construction, but also resulted in a storage and wholesale facility that lent itself to organizing and shipping the products of the hardware manufactures of the Steel City.

The three principal facades are essentially identical, developed as a repetitive bay system that corresponds to the column grid of the interior. The first floor is treated as a massive arcade of segmentally arched brick piers, that carries a brick entablature-like belt course capped by a brick "modillion course". At the second story, a "giant order" of piers at the same plane as the base rise two stories to carry a handsome brick cornice, and frame a recessed wall panels. That panel is penetrated by pairs of segmental headed windows that light the top two stories. The crowning cornice is handsome, and affirms the classical proportions of the design, by itself being developed with regularly spaced triglyphe-like panels and modillion-like rows to recall a Roman Tuscan cornice. Those triglyphs are paired at each pier to suggest the weight of the entablature carried by the pier, recalling the French Neo-Grec architectural idea of empathy. Each of the four facades repeat this system giving the Bindley Hardware a four square monumentality that is characteristic of architecture in Pittsburgh after Richardson's Allegheny Country Courthouse.

(Continued)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Bindley Hardware Co.

Item number 7

Page 2

The repetitive system and monumental scale disguises the intended variation that occurs in the infill of the first story masonry openings. On the rear of the east wall, the six southernmost bays are treated as large windows subdivided by a central paneled pier carrying a lintel that sets off the three sashes of the transom. The adjacent four bays were used as loading docks with garage type doors, and the last two bays returned to the normal fenestration. On the north side toward the railroad siding, the first floor openings were all used as loading bays spaced so as to accommodate the doors of box cars and built at a level to eliminate any need to lift or lower goods. The Amberson Avenue facade fenestration repeated the normal paired windows below the three light transoms, with the exception of the bay closest to the rail siding, which was open as a street front loading door, and the seventh bay which contained a door to the executive offices. That center bay was modernized in 1952 with a granite surround to emphasize the entrance. Upper level fenestration is typically one over one double hung sash, in all of the paired segmental headed openings.

At the south end of the site, on the triangular remnant of the property, the Bindley Hardware Company erected a one and a half story garage, capped by light steel framed corrugated metal clad monitors. Those continued the modillion-like articulation of the main block on the pier. Evidence from atlases shows two bays existing at the outset indicating that these served the delivery wagons and later the trucking fleet of the Hardware Company.

The interior makes clear the immense capacity for storage, and shipment of heavy hardware supplies. Every sixteen feet, paired I channel columns carry massive iron girders, which in turn carry beams spaced three feet on center that support the diagonal flooring. The building is a regular column grid from the basement through the third story. The interior is subdivided into quadrants by brick fire walls that rise from the basement to the roof. Those are interrupted at each structural bay by segmentally arched openings that permit movement from quarter to quarter while fire protection was provided by heat activated fire doors over each opening.

The corner of the first floor, closest to the Shadyside railroad station has always served as executive offices, though of utmost simplicity befitting its industrial status. That use remains to the present. With the exception of a small showroom for the current tenant, (another hardware dealer) the interior, and the exterior remain essentially as designed and constructed by Albion Bindley for the family hardware business in 1903.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Bindley Hardware Co.

Item number 8

Page 2

president for the Guarantee Title and Trust Co., while his brother also held positions on the boards of insurance companies (Central Accident, City Insurance). (Whitney, Stevenson, & Co., Blue Book and Cyclopedias passim.) The financial resources of the brothers enabled them to develop a secondary tier of industry, whose principal function was to make products for the hardware trade which they of course already dominated. These new enterprises included a cluster of industrial complexes near Charleroi, PA, including Monesson Coke, and Pittsburgh Steel (now Pittsburgh-Wheeling Steel). From those industries, they could supply their own plants which manufactured finished hardware supplies -- Pittsburgh Steel Products, Co. and Neely Nut and Bolt, both of which had been established prior to 1900. (Jordon, pp. 51 - 55) It was no doubt that this pyramid of industry led their biographers to refer to "Their talent for conducting enterprises on a larger scale and along progressive lines." (Jordon, p. 53.)

By the 1890s, the industrial assemblage that the Bindley family had created brought the family growing regional prestige. From 1896 until 1902, John Bindley was president of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce which brought him into contact with a wide variety of his professional peers. (Notable Men of Pittsburgh and Vicinity, 1901, n.p.) In 1899, he was elected to head the National Hardware Association which he had helped found in 1895. (New York Times, 17 December 1921, p.13, col. 3) It was the principal trade organization of that business, and his activities in it that led him to propose the National Combine for hardware alluded to above. His efforts gained him a prominent place in the industry and caused Saunders Norvell, hardware jobber and later editor of the industry's Hardware Reports, and author of Forty Years of Hardware, (New York, Hardware Age, York, 1923), to quote extensively from the Iron Age's (10 April 1902) assessment of his career: "John Bindley ... has indefatigably applied himself to the working out of the details incidental to a consolidation of the jobbers of hardware ... Through the knowledge which came to him as president of the National Hardware Association ... He believed an amalgamation or community of interests was the only practicable course to insure an economic distribution of goods. His position as chief of the National Hardware Association brought him in close touch with important commercial problems, and under his supervision were introduced various methods for keeping track of costs, determining selling prices, etc., the results of which gave him a comprehensive knowledge of the physical details of marketing hardware.

(Continued)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet    Bindley Hardware Co.    Item number    8    Page    3

"The first definite step looking to a consummation of his plans was held in Pittsburgh, July 3, 1901, and from which the present organization is now taking shape. The high place which Mr. Bindley will hold in the consolidation whose consummation is so largely due to his efforts is a fitting recognition of his character, ability and position in the trade."

When that consolidation fell apart due to premature discussions with the press and government hostility, Bindley, far from retreating, organized his own regional version of the combine, based on his family control of Neely Nut and Bolt, and Pittsburgh Steel Products, and his own wholesale corporation. Having determined that distribution was the key, Bindley chose to erect a new wholesale facility that provided direct access to the railroads, and to the road systems, and which would serve as an example of the efficiencies which he assumed would come from the business combine. The new building was begun within six months of the collapse of negotiations for the combine, and made the Bindley Hardware Company, ... "the largest of its kind in Pittsburgh," while its railroad siding and access to the vast trackage of the Pennsylvania Railroad made its "facilities for handling goods, unexcelled by those of any other hardware house in the country." (The East End, 1907, p. 41)

It should be noted further, that hardware was big business in Pittsburgh at the turn of the century, and that just as the city led the nation in iron and steel, it could also claim to lead the nation in iron and steel products. When the National Hardware Association held its first meeting, and published a program, the editors of Pittsburgh of Today (1896) reported its views on the city's importance to the industry. In abbreviated form it noted:

"Pittsburgh makes 900,000 kegs of nails a year; 135,000 dozen shovels and scoops; makes one half of the screw, strap, and butt hinges produced in this country .... 75-percent of the total [of heavy tools].

Further:

"The largest plumbing and sanitary supply manufacturing plant in the world is located in Pittsburgh.

(Continued)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Bindley Hardware Co.

Item number 8

Page 4

and

"the five active concerns in this line (iron and steel pipes) have an estimated capital of \$25,000,000 , employ 10,000 men and produce 70-percent of all pipe and boiler tubes made in the United States."

Even on a regional basis, the business which Bindley unified was indeed immense.

The new building was erected by Albion Bindley, youngest of the three brothers, who had taken over the architectural and construction business of their father. Though conservative in style as industrial buildings tend to be, it is architecturally imposing, as it merged the materials and colors of the late victorian industrial design with the larger scale classicism of the turn of the century, that in turn recalled the mass and architectonic effect of Henry Hobson Richardson's great courthouse. Though the warehouse is architecturally impressive Albion Bindley's real task was to create a building that would function as an extension of John Bindley's vision of an integrated industrial storage, sales and shipment facility not unlike the contemporary Sears, Roebuck Co. of Chicago for housewares and dry goods. This he accomplished in a fashion that warranted comment a decade later and remains in its intended original use to the present day, now being occupied by another of Pittsburgh's historic hardware houses, the J. A. Williams Co. (formerly also in the downtown at 115-121 Grant Street). Truck and box car level loading docks were placed on the north and east sides, with bulk freight elevator placed so as to serve each quadrant, while hazardous materials could be isolated in one quadrant, served by its own elevator, and given special fire protection by chemical extinguishers. Specialized keg conveyers and hoists served other areas, and the whole was powered by its own "up to date electric plant." The result was a building that brilliantly served its shipment requirements.

So many of the contemporary industrial buildings in the Pittsburgh area, tended to be constructed of light iron frames, covered with corrugated iron which, while impressive volumes are unlikely candidates for survival or reuse in today's economic climate. Because of its intended warehouse and storage functions, the Bindley Hardware Company building, was built of permanent materials. Fortunately it survives on the Pennsylvania Railroad's main line into Pittsburgh to recall the industrial supremacy of the steel city, and the constant efforts of its industrialists to expand it sphere of influence.

(Continued)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Bindley Hardware Co,

Item number 8

Page 5

Most of the landmarks to the Bindley family in Pittsburgh have succumbed to a generation of rebuilding of the downtown, including the Duquesne Bank, and the hardware store on 7th Street; current newspaper stories make it clear that Pittsburgh Wheeling Steel Company will soon join the Neely Nut and Bolt, and Monesson Coke Company in the graveyard of heavy industry that casts its pall over the Monongahela Valley. Fortunately, the landmark that recalls John Bindley's extraordinary attempt to organize the American hardware industry survives, and because of the permanence of its construction, offers the likelihood of remaining for generations to come. As a survivor from the days when Pittsburgh could boast of being "the industrial center of Amercia, and as the sole monument to John Bindley's vision of a unified hardware industry, the Bindley Hardware Company building deserves to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Bindley Hardware Co.

Item number 9

Page 1

Biographies:

"Edwin Bindley" in John W. Jordan, LL.D., Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography, Vol. II. New York: 1917. pp. 51 - 53.

"John Bindley" in John W. Jordan, LL.D. Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography, Vol. II. New York: 1917. pp. 53 - 55.

"Albion Bindley" in John W. Jordan, LL.D., Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography, Vol. II. New York: 1917. pp. 56 - 57.

John Bindley obituary, New York Times, 17 December 1921, p. 13, col. 3.

Notable Men of Pittsburgh. Press of Pittsburgh Printing Co., 1901.

Palmer's Pittsburgh, R.M. Palmer, Publisher. Pittsburgh: 1905. p. 71, 96.

Whitney, Stephenson & Co. Blue Book and Cyclopedia. Pittsburgh, 1904.  
passim.

Hardware Industry:

The East End, Pittsburgh Board of Trade, 1907 p. 41.

History and Commerce of Pittsburgh and Environs. New York: A.F. Parsons Publishing Company, 1893 - 94. passim.

Norvell Saunders, Forty Years of Hardware. New York: Hardware Age, 1923.  
pp. 385 - 420.

Pittsburgh of Today. Compiled by the Consolidated Illustrating Co.,  
Pittsburgh, 1896. passim.

Atlases:

G.M. Hopkins, Atlas of Greater Pittsburgh, 1910, pl. 9.

Sanborn Map Co. Insurance Map of the City of Pittsburgh, 1925. Vol. 3,  
pl. 306.

City Records:

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection, Yearly Docket of Building Permits,  
#581, 27 April 1903.

Recorder of Deeds, Allegheny Courthouse Annex, Pittsburgh, PA.



**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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Continuation sheet      Bindley Hardware      Item number 10      Page 1

**Boundary Description:**

Beginning on the easterly side of Amberson Avenue at a pin in the angle formed by the bend in said Avenue; thence along the line of the property of Anne P. Childs, and parallel with Ellsworth Avenue, north 66 degrees 54 minutes east 390 feet, more or less, to the westerly line of property now or formerly of E.B. Alsop; thence extending along said Alsop property in a northerly direction a distance of 158 feet more or less, to the southerly line of property lately conveyed by Anne P. Childs and A.H. Childs her husband, to the Pennsylvania Railroad Co.; thence along the line of property of the said Pennsylvania Railroad Co. 198 feet, more or less, to a point on the easterly side of Amberson Avenue aforesaid; thence in a southwesterly direction along said line of Amberson Avenue 368 feet, more or less, to a pin at the place of beginning.

**Boundary Justification:**

The property is entirely the site of the warehouse, its railroad siding and truck access, and constitutes the original Bindley property.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1903	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1903 Builder/Architect Albion Bindley

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Bindley Hardware Company Building on Amberson Avenue focusses attention on John Bindley, one of Pittsburgh's principal industrialists, and the prime instigator of an attempt to create a National Hardware combine, on the order of the recently formed United States Steel Company. That scheme came, naturally, from Bindley who from the 1890s had been engaged in manufacturing hardware supplies, some of which he sold through the Bindley Hardware Company wholesale facility in central Pittsburgh. From 1899 until 1901 John Bindley served as the head of the National Hardware Association, where he formulated the idea of a national system of distributing hardware that would merge the principal wholesale houses of the United States. In 1902 that scheme was well underway before collapsing under the threat of anti-trust legislation. Six months later, in response to the failure of that initiative, Bindley in 1903 created his own Pittsburgh-based regional hardware combine in this building on the Pennsylvania Railroad main line. Bindley's brother, Albion Bindley (1851 - 1904), a regionally important builder, designed and constructed a modern elevator serviced distributing center which gave the Bindley enterprise dominance in the hardware business of the Pittsburgh region. The building itself is an imposing brick industrial landmark that not only emphasizes Pittsburgh's former national significance as a center for the production of iron and steel as well as finished products at the turn of the century, but also, is one of the few structures capable of carrying the city's industrial legacy long into the future.

By all standards, the Bindley family ranks with the principal industrialists of Pittsburgh at the turn of the century and their rise to prominence rivals that of any of the local Horatio Algiers. Beginning as a clerk in the hardware company of John England, John Bindley (1846 - 1921) shortly rose to partnership in the England and Bindley Company. (Jordon, Encyclopedia of Pennsylvanian Biography, pp. 53 - 55) By the 1880s, Bindley alone operated the company. At the same time, the Bindley family was engaged in developing a base in the primary industries necessary for the creation of an integrated business empire. Brother Edwin (1842 - 1906) later the vice president of the hardware company, helped found the Duquesne National Bank in 1871 (Director, 1875, Vice-president, 1878, President, 1893), and served as vice-president of the Dollar Savings Bank. (Jordon, pp. 51, 53) John Bindley also served as a director for the Duquesne National Bank and as vice

(Continued)

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1.6 acres

Quadrangle name Pittsburgh East Quadrangle

Quadrangle scale 1 : 24,000

UTM References

A 

1	7	5	8	9	8	0	0	4	4	7	8	4	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See attached sheet.

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

state Pennsylvania code county Allegheny code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title George E. Thomas, Ph.D.

organization Clio Group, Inc.

date February 4, 1985

street & number 3961 Baltimore Avenue

telephone (215) 386-6276

city or town Philadelphia

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 6/24/85

For NPS use only

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

date

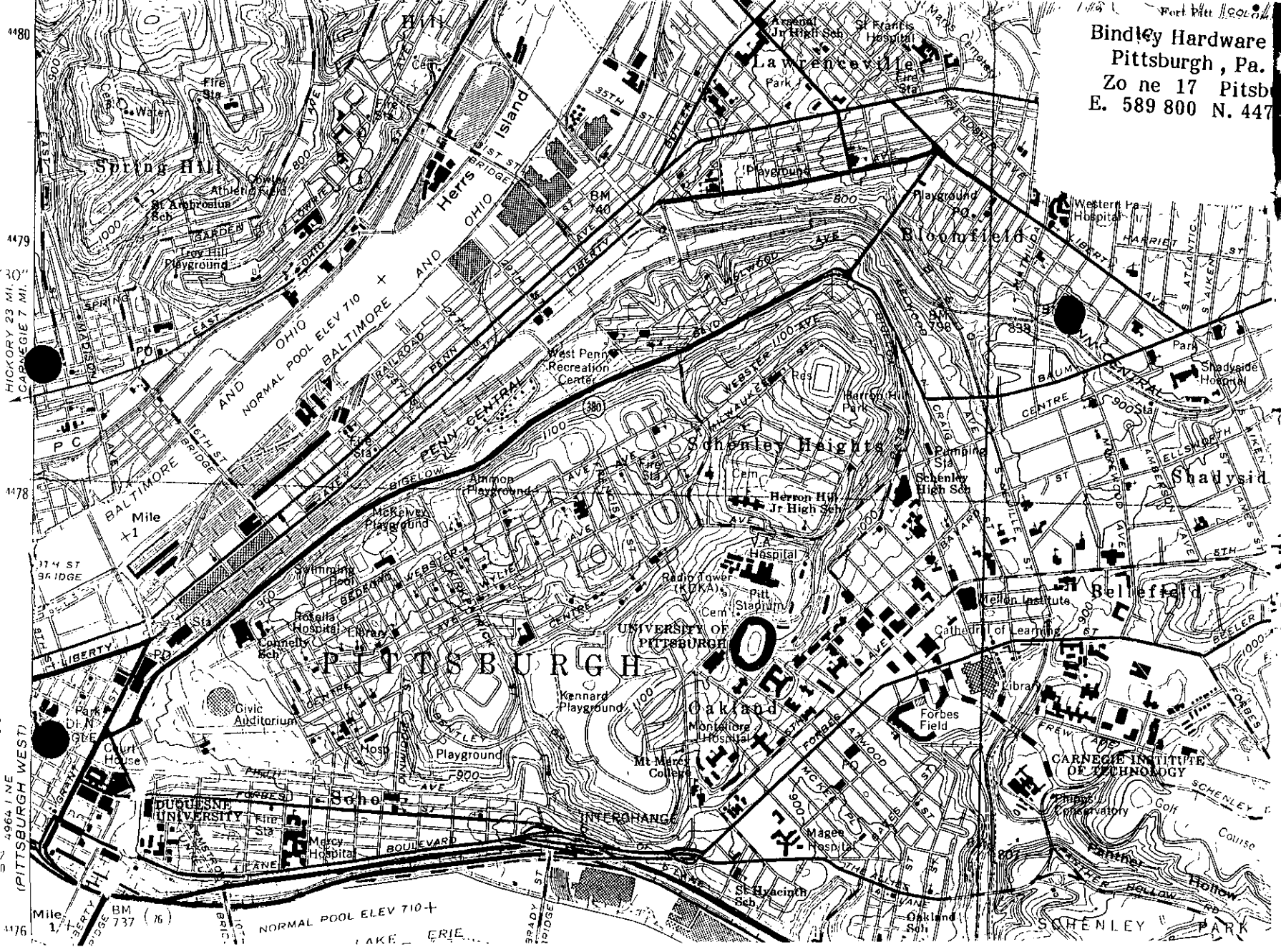
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

Bindley Hardware  
Pittsburgh, Pa.  
Zone 17 Pittsb  
E. 589 800 N. 447



4980  
479  
478  
476  
HICKORY 23 MI. 30"  
CABANEGIE 7 MI.  
PITTSBURGH WEST  
4964 LINE  
Mile 1  
BM 737 (76)  
LAKE - ERIE