

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 15A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Downer Tavern

other names/site number Downer, Jonathan, House

2. Location

street & number U.S. Rt. 40

not for publication

city or town Chalkhill (Wharton Twp.)

vicinity

state Pennsylvania

code PA

county Fayette

code 051

zip code 15421

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

DR. BRENT D. GLASS

Brent D. Glass 9/29/95

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

PA HISTORICAL & MUSEUM COMMISSION

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the
National Register
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the
National Register.

removed from the National
Register.

other, (explain)

Downer Tavern
Name of Property

Fayette Co., PA
County and State

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
3		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic : Hotel
Domestic : Single Dwelling
Domestic : Secondary Structure

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce : Speciality Store

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Federal

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
walls Brick
roof Asphalt
other Wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Downer Tavern
Name of Property

Fayette Co., PA
County and State

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.)

Property is:

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

Architecture

Period of Significance

C. 1826 - C. 1852

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Downer Tavern
Name of Property

Fayette Co., PA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property Less then one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	7
---	---

 Zone

6	1	8	2	8	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Easting

4	4	1	1	5	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Northing

3

--	--

 Zone

--	--	--	--

 Easting

--	--	--	--	--	--

 Northing

2

--	--	--	--	--	--

4

--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jerry A. Clouse, Preservation Specialist

organization Penna. Hist. + Museum Commission date July 25, 1995

street & number P.O. Box 1026 telephone 717-783-9918

city or town Harrisburg state PA zip code 17108-1026

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Robert A. Guerriere

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town Chalkhill state PA zip code 15421

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications 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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1021-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Downer Tavern, Fayette Co., Pa.

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Description

The **Downer Tavern** is situated about forty-five feet off the south side of U.S. Route 40 on the western slope of Chalk Hill. Like all the National Road taverns, not only is it situated near the road, but faces the road as well. This c. 1826, five-bay, single pile, two-and-a-half story, brick house was built with a center hall plan and a two-story, brick kitchen ell extending along the west gable end. Federal style detailing can be found throughout the house. On the front and west sides is a tree shaded lawn. To the southeast of the house are two gravel parking lots and directly south of the wash house is a one-story, ell shaped, late twentieth-century commercial building with a one-story storage building behind it. A one-story, late twentieth-century addition was added to the east gable end of the main block. Just south of the kitchen ell stands a late nineteenth-century wash house. An early nineteenth-century, one-and-a-half story, stone spring house stands southwest of the house. The house is distinguished as a tavern by its relatively large size, especially the large kitchen ell to the rear. Although changes have been made to this property over the years since its construction, it retains sufficient integrity to represent the earliest period in the commercial development of the National Road.

The tavern rests on a low rubblestone foundation. The front elevation of the house was laid in Flemish bond, but the remainder was laid in common bond. There is a bulkhead entrance into the cellar on the west gable end. The present owner said that his father excavated the cellar beneath the western half of the building. There is only a crawl space beneath the remainder of the house.

The exterior architectural detailing of the **Downer Tavern** is modest. The front elevation of the building is highlighted with a corbeled brick cornice beneath the molded, boxed cornice. The gable ends are accented with cornice returns. The low pitched roof of each gable end is pierced by a corbeled brick chimney. The front is also graced with an early twentieth-century, hipped roof porch. The roof line of the porch is broken in the center with a shallow pediment. The porch is supported with unadorned, wooden, Doric columns. The one-over-one double hung sash windows throughout the house have projecting stone sills. Two, small, multi-paned windows light the attic in the west gable end, those in the east gable end have been covered over.

The front door features eight raised panels and has a rectangular transom above. The stair hall provides access to three of the four first floor rooms as well as to the opposing rear door and the stairs. The centerpiece of the stair hall is the open staircase which extends to the attic. The staircase features a turned newel post, rectangular spindles, and a carved handrail.

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Curvilinear molding is applied to the stringer beneath each tread characteristic of the Federal period. (In other words the stringer is bracketed.) The spandrel is filled with triangular and rectangular, molded, raised panels. The door beneath the stairs opens into a closet. The east parlor has a fireplace centered along the gable wall. Its surround consists of full Doric columns supporting a wide mantel with a stepped cornice typical of the late Federal style. The west parlor has a fireplace similarly located. However, the mantel in this room is supported with panelled pilasters, and the shape of the cornice is not as pronounced. Most of the original window and door surrounds in the main block and kitchen ell survive intact. The house retains oak floors throughout. There are chestnut, beaded board ceilings in the kitchen ell.

There are five recessed, panelled doors throughout the second floor similar to the closet door beneath the stairs. The bedroom above the east parlor has a fireplace along the gable wall. The mantel to this fireplace has a surround with panelled pilasters similar to those in the west parlor. There is a shallow closet between the fireplace and the south wall. The bedroom above the west parlor has no fireplace or closet.

The rafters for this low pitched roof are only hewn on their top side. They are mortised, tenoned, and pegged at their apex. They are numbered as well.

Immediately behind the kitchen there is a late nineteenth-century, frame wash house with vertical board and batten siding. Southwest of the house stands an early nineteenth century, one-and-a-half story, three bay, stone spring house which is now used as a residence. This banked building measures 15 x 30 feet.

Although alterations, such as a small addition to the east side and interior modifications, such as the replacement of the multi-paned sash with one-over-one sash, have been made to the **Downer Tavern**, it is still able to convey its early nineteenth century significance in association with the National Road. The building retains good integrity overall, and the character and feeling of the property remains intact. Likewise, the building remains a good example of the vernacular Federal style.

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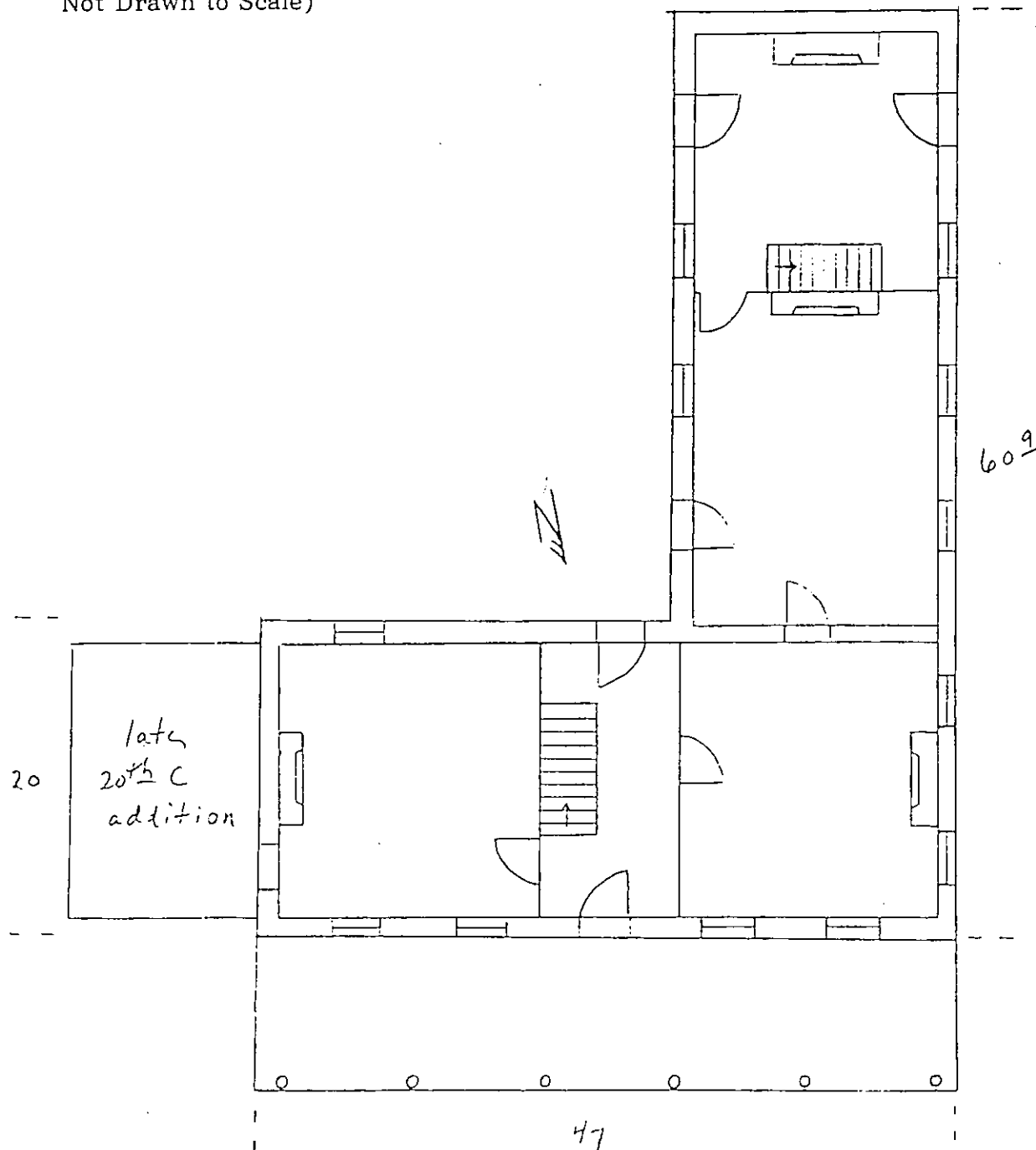
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First Floor Plan
(Not Drawn to Scale)



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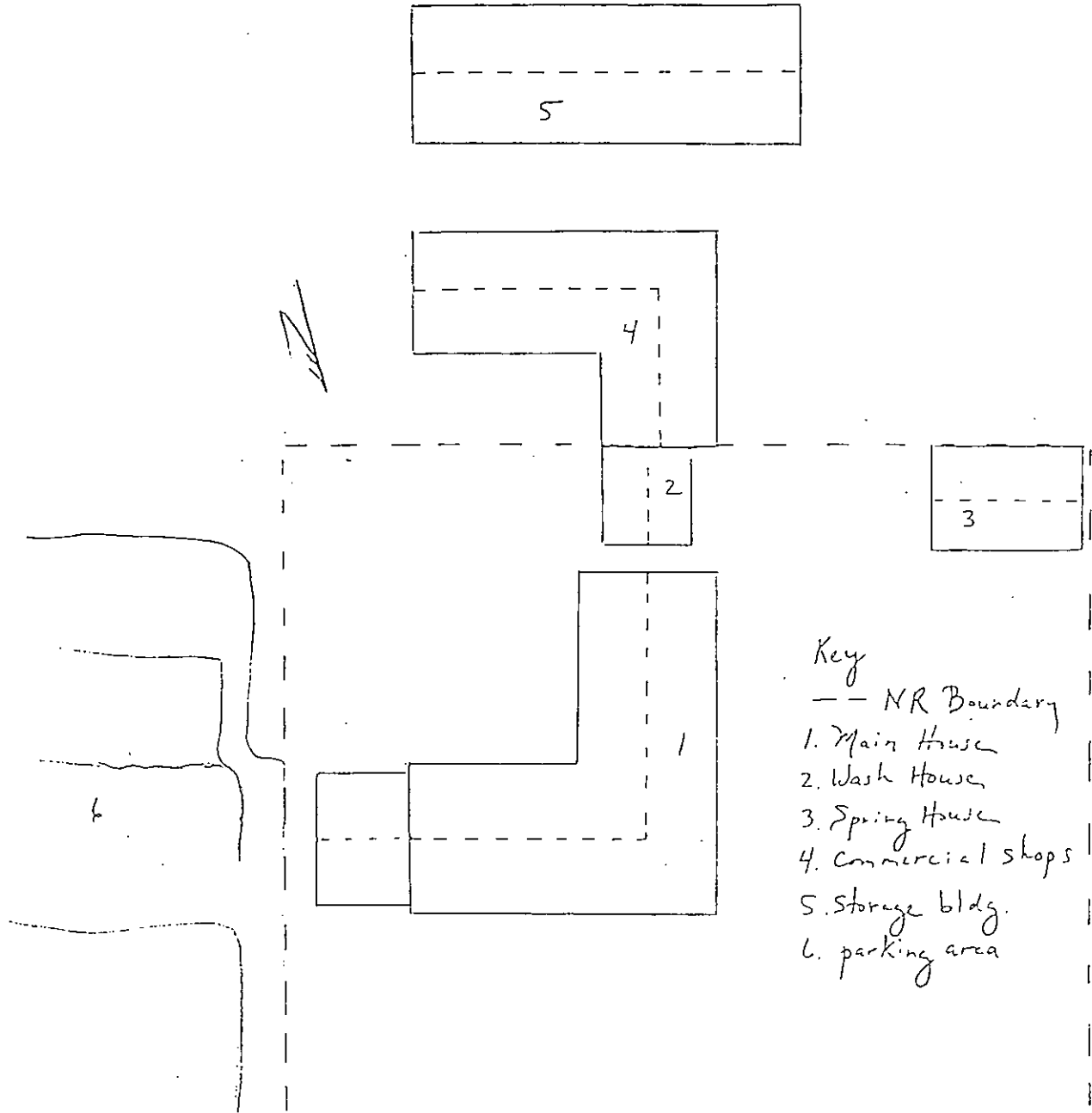
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Site Plan
(Not Drawn to Scale)



- Key
- NR Boundary
 - 1. Main House
 - 2. Wash House
 - 3. Spring House
 - 4. Commercial shops
 - 5. Storage bldg.
 - 6. parking area

U. S. Rt. 40

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Significance

The Downer Tavern is significant in the areas of commerce and architecture. This building is part of the property type "Tavern Buildings" as discussed in Historic Resources of the National Road in Pennsylvania Multiple Property Documentation Form. Among the requirements to meet Criterion A the tavern must be documented to be associated with the National Road. To meet Criterion C a tavern must possess architectural integrity which means it should still be identifiable as a tavern through its form and basic floor plan.

This c. 1826 tavern was built during a period of rapid development in Wharton Township largely associated with the National Road. In 1818 there were five innkeepers in the township, but by 1820 there were twelve. In 1818 eight turnpike contractors were living in the township as well as turnpike bridge builder James Kincaid. There was a lucrative trade along the pike during this time. Jonathan Downer was assessed with a tavern in the township by 1816. Searight's history noted that Downer built a frame tavern across the road from this building in 1823. Searight also stated that Downer was succeeded in that location by Boss Rush. (1)

Jonathan Downer (1754-1833) was a son of Jacob and Elizabeth (Starner) Downer who settled on Braddock's Run in the late eighteenth century. (Braddock's Road crosses the National Road at Braddock's Run.) Jonathan was married to Drusilla Springer, and they had thirteen children. He lived in Uniontown until 1813 when he came back to the homestead in Wharton Township and built his first tavern there. In 1818 he moved to the National Road and built a tavern at Chalk Hill. (2)

Jonathan Downer was taxed as an innkeeper in Wharton Township from 1816 until his death in 1833. Although this particular property was willed to his son Hiram, his wife continued to be assessed there as an innkeeper until 1838. Evidently, age prevented her continuation in that occupation. Although tradition states that the brick building was constructed in 1823, the year 1826 is when the tax assessments indicate a change. In that year Downer was taxed with the tavern on 64 acres, whereas previously he had been taxed as an innkeeper on a tract of 240 acres, later known as the "old place." During the early National Road period innkeepers had considerably higher incomes than farmers, artisans, and craftsmen. This enabled men like Downer to purchase additional lands and invest in larger taverns. (3)

Hiram Downer's 1847 will bequeathed his share in the estate to his sisters, Ruth, Rachel, and Sarah. By 1872 the sisters' nephews David and Jacob Johnson were listed as the owners of Downer estate at Chalk Hill. (4)

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Although the histories disagree as to when and where Jonathan had his taverns, the writer has concluded that this particular house was built as a tavern c. 1826. Its design and layout is very similar to other taverns along the National Road. (5)

The Downer Tavern is one of about thirty taverns/hotels which were determined eligible as part of the Multiple Property Resources of the National Road. (Grantz's 1987 survey concluded that less than a third of the taverns of the early National Road era have survived.) Most are of masonry construction, but few retain as many Federal style architectural details that can be seen in this hostelry. There are two other taverns, the Fayette Springs Hotel and the Samuel Fraser Tavern associated with the National Road in Wharton Township. Both are different from the Downer House in size and in architectural details. (6)

The Downer Tavern is significant not only for its association with the early commercial development of the National Road but as a good example of vernacular tavern house architecture with Federal style details as well.

End Notes

(1) Thomas B. Searight, The Old Pike: A History of the National Road, with Incidents, Accidents, and Anecdotes Thereon (Berryville, VA: The Prince Maccus Publishers, 1983), p. 230.

(2) Franklin Ellis, ed., History of Fayette County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1882), pp. 831, 833, 834, 836.

(3) Wharton Township, Fayette County Tax Assessments, 1816-1840, 1856; Fayette County Will Book 1, Vol III, p. 1192.

(4) Fayette County Will book 2, Vol II, p. 572; Atlas of the County of Fayette and State of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins & Co., 1872), p. 63.

(5) Ellis's history stated that the frame Downer Tavern was erected in 1818 by Jonathan Downer as a wagon stand after he quit his former tavern at Braddock's Run. Bruce states that the frame Downer Tavern was built by Jonathan Downer in 1823. This building was located across the road from the building described in this nomination.

(6) Denise L. Grantz. "National Road: Historic Resource Survey, Final Report and Analysis Submitted to the Bureau for Historic Preservation (unpublished report dated June 30, 1987), p. 25.

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Bibliography

Atlas of the County of Fayette and State of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins & Co., 1872)

Robert Bruce, The National Road (Berryville, Va: The Prince Maccus Publishers, 1983).

Franklin Ellis, ed., History of Fayette County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1882).

Denise L. Grantz. "National Road: Historic Resource Survey, Final Report and Analysis Submitted to the Bureau for Historic Preservation (unpublished report dated June 30, 1987).

Thomas B. Searight, The Old Pike: A History of the National Road, with Incidents, Accidents, and Anecdotes Thereon (Berryville, VA: The Prince Maccus Publishers, 1983).

Wharton Township, Fayette County, Assessment Records, 1816-1840, 1856.

Fayette County Deed Books.

Fayette County Will Books.

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Boundary Description

Beginning at a point on the southern edge of U.S. Route 40 approximately eighty-one feet beyond the western wall of the Downer Tavern and proceeding northeast from this point along this line to a point twenty-five feet behind the tavern, then proceeding from this point in southeasterly direction to a point twenty feet beyond the eastern edge of the tavern, then proceeding in a southwesterly direction approximately 131 feet to a point on the northern edge of U.S. Route 40, then proceeding in a northwesterly direction approximately 118 feet to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The boundary only includes the land immediately surrounding the Downer Tavern and contributing outbuildings in order to exclude noncontributing structures and open land surrounding the property.

Downer Tavern
Fayette Co., Pa.

Fort Necessity Quad
Zone 17
E 618280 N 441150

