

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 Lee Tire and Rubber Company

and/or common Lee Park

## 2. Location

street & number 1100 Hector Street

\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Conshohocken \_\_\_ vicinity of

state PA code 42 county Montgomery code

## 3. Classification

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

## 4. Owner of Property

name Spring Mill Associates

street & number 1100 Hector Street

city, town Conshohocken \_\_\_ vicinity of state PA

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Courthouse

street & number Airy and Swede Streets

city, town Norristown state PA

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

date \_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

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

The Lee Tire plant stands at a great bend in the Schuylkill River, on a site at the east end of Conshohocken, one of Pennsylvania's most important 19th-century manufacturing towns. The town was laid out as a grid with its major mansions (including that of J. Ellwood Lee) on Fayette Street, on the crest of the bluff above the river. Along the riverbank was a band of industry which was concentrated near the Schuylkill Canal which ran from Freedly to Jones Street. There the Lukens Rolling Mill and Alan Wood's Schuylkill Ironworks were joined by woolen mills, a pipe manufactory and other heavy industries that took advantage of the water supply and waterborne transportation. Eventually, their sites were paralleled to the northeast by tracks of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad which provided finished goods from Conshohocken. The Lee Tire plant stands beyond Jones Street on the same riverbank as the rest of the town's industry, but south of the end of the canal. Its placement makes its 20th-century date evident.

The plant is mainly of the modern, sprawling, land intensive one- and two-story building types, in contrast to the old multi-story mills of the 19th century. Lee had used such a structure for an earlier first aid supply business which he had founded at Seventh and Harvey Streets in 1889, and which was acquired by Johnson & Johnson pharmaceuticals in 1905. Its smaller floor area and separate floors was reasonable given the smaller scale of manufacturing bandages, splints and silk surgical guts. For an architectural solution to the large scale process of manufacturing auto tires, Lee looked to the sprawling automated plants of the midwest. From these buildings come the characteristic low one-story structures, each of which handled a special function.

If the bulk of the factory is of one and two levels, the most visible and architecturally notable building is a vast, 4-story, symmetrical structure with terminating and central towers, laid up with coursed brickwork. That building, designed in 1909 by William Steele, was given over to laboratories, medical care and a machine shop, and the primary use, administration -- a use made apparent by its forward position, by the plan, and by the richer styling of the building. Such differentiation of management into separate structures was conventional, serving to organize process and to establish hierarchies. Here it established the principal public visage of the Lee Tire Company, for from the street along the riverfront and later from the Schuylkill Expressway, it was this building which was most visible. It spans the full width of the production facility, screening those less attractive buildings from view. It remains essentially intact, though a generation ago the original industrial sash were replaced by more up-to-date aluminum windows on the front and sides. They replicate the tripartite subdivision of the 1909 windows, recalling their scale and pattern. The re-

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maining detail, Tuscan engaged columns framing the doors, iron four globed classical lamps, capital blocks above each pier and shields and pediments above the end towers are as built; only the mansarded dome of the central tower has been lost, replaced by a super scaled clock that serves to hasten commuters across the river. Interiors were always unadorned, with little more than the poured concrete framework articulating the vast halls.

To the rear of the administration building are the results of half a century of modification and adjustment to the manufacturing process, with some 34 buildings connecting one to the next in a vast labyrinth. These buildings are now identified by number, i.e. Building 2, Building 4, Building 4A, with the sequence ending at 66. Because the oldest of the buildings, the molding plant, is numbered 2, and the bridges connecting to the administration block (Building #1) are 4 and 6, while the plant gate house with its water tower is 7, it seems reasonable to conclude that the numbers more or less refer to construction sequence.

Of those buildings, #2 is the largest, and represents the oldest manufacturing space. It is essentially a five bay wide reinforced concrete building that runs nearly the length of the office block. Its columns show the rough texture of the wooden forms and were continuously poured with the concrete slabs. Its exterior was of the utmost simplicity; rubble walls form the grade level construction, while above the construction bay is indicated by brick piers framing industrial steel windows with pivot sash in the upper and lower portions. It is paralleled by the vulcanizing Building #35 which was built with the more advanced H section steel columns, riveted to the flanges that project up through the floor. To the east is a larger and later extension (#45) running the full width of #35 and #2, and continuing their spaces and framing system. That building utilizes the same H channel rolled steel with the exposed riveted flanges of the earlier building, and suggests that the construction date was not far removed from the second building phase. Its exterior corresponds to similar William Steele factories with projecting brick piers marking the construction bay and framing long runs of steel windows separated by mullions into four units that sit on concrete sills. By stepping the coping of every other bay, the architects created a subtle symmetrical facade that reflects its salient position beyond the original line of construction.

Behind Building #45 and on a line with the original construction is a water tower building that also served as a managerial space. The tower itself was given architectural interest by treating it as a medieval tower that subtly bulges to suggest the cylindrical tank carried on a square base. Crenella-

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tions across the top, gothic pointed lancets with wood sash tracery and a battlemented entrance with gothic windows on the side complete this whimsical little building. It should be noted that the water tower is part of a regional building type that includes examples at Price and McLanahan's Rose Valley community and Frank Furness' Shipley residence in West Chester. In each of those instances, the offices were included below the water tower (despite the risk of damage to the office) because the evaporation cooled the interior during the summer. It thus represents an early climate control system.

Attached to a northward extension to Building #2 is the second major line of construction, including Buildings #36, #37, #38 and Buildings #41, #41A, and #44, all of which was erected after the 1920 survey, but before the Depression. It was here that Lee Tire began to grind and mix its own rubber in buildings directly adjacent to the rail sidings. These buildings form a heroic industrial skyline with immense hoppers forming industrially scaled crenellations above the bayed, brick factory wall. Within that building are a network of pipes and tubes that fine tune the mix, all at the command of an automated central mixer.

From the mixing rooms, the product was conveyed to a sequence of vulcanizing machines and then semi-automatic presses, the first of the type in the nation, before finally feeding back to Building #2 for the molding and finishing. All of these buildings share the common architectural vocabulary of exposed H channel steel columns and beams, screened on the exterior by brick walls articulated by projecting piers marking each bay, framing three or four windows of small pane sash per bay. The compact group of factory buildings in line with the sides of the administration block are primarily of the first quarter of the 20th century in date, and are unified by their common purpose and sequence of industrial process, centered around the railroad initiated and terminated production line.

To the rear of the site are an immense low group of more recent buildings that marked a shift in allegiance to the trucking industry. While contributing to the site, they are separate enough that they can be considered apart from the original building group in function, age and organization. These later buildings were designed by a local industrial firm, Sanders & Thomas, Inc., in 1969.

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Buildings of Significance on the Lee Tire Site:

Building #1: "Main Building"

Four-story reinforced concrete administration building designed by William Steele, 1909; end and center towers with raised parapet and shallow pediments at the corners; walls are concrete frame with brick infill below sash; original industrial sash replaced c.1960 on front and sides but remain on rear; rusticated brick coursing on towers, classically surrounded doors on central tower and near ends; original mansard of central tower replaced by immense clock.

Building #2: "Tire Building"

Two-story reinforced concrete industrial building, 1909; columns and slab system, showing form marks; concrete floor; flat roof; rubble lower story with brick piers and industrial sash; since screened on the south side by Building #35, and at east end by Building #45.

Building #4: "Compound Room"

Two-story sheathed, reinforced concrete extension to Building #2, 1909; industrial iron sash.

Building #6: "Passage"

Two-story steel framed wire glass bridge to Tire Building from Main Building, 1909.

Building #7: "Water Tower"

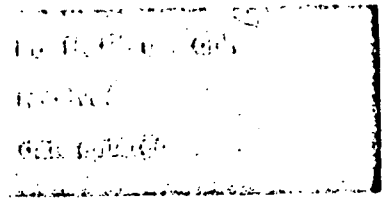
Four-story rubble stone water tower, 1909, with lancet Gothic windows, fronted by crenellated portico (infilled c.1960 with cinder block); water tank removed from roof.

Building #8: Annex to Water Tower

One-story access to Storage Building (since demolished) with garage doors for loading material; paneled brick walls; pre-1909.

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Building #28:

Post 1920 brick exterior, concrete slab one-story building with I channel iron columns, riveted to flanges projecting from floor; pre-Depression industrial building.

Building #35:

Five bay H channel iron columned with wood beam building; exterior rubble masonry to first floor; brick piers and spandrels; flat roof; housed original vulcanizing machinery prior to 1920.

Buildings #36, 38:

Grinding Building, later converted to part of Mixing Building; wood column and joist system; two-story industrial building; some iron columns inserted as column replacements; pre-1920 building with later alterations.

Building #37:

Two-story insert between #36 and #38; brick walls; steel I section columns; pre 1929.

Building #45: Extension to "Tire Building"

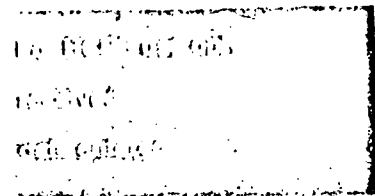
Two-story brick industrial building with brick piers marking structural bays; corbeled brick cornice; soldier course above windows; steel industrial sash organized in groups of three; H channel steel columns carry concrete slab floor.

Buildings #48, 49, 50:

Continuous two-story brick industrial service spine for vulcanizing process paralleling grinding and mixing facility; brick piers mark structural bay; three light industrial sash for openings; concrete sills; terra cotta coping; H channel iron columns; some windows infilled with cement block by previous operator; post 1920 survey, pre 1929; similar to #35.

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**Buildings #41, #41A: Vulcanizing Building**

Two-story monumental brick industrial building, paralleled by railroad yard; massive hoppers on roof to create gravity fed mixing system with conveyors around roof level; brick piers and cornice form raised panel on exterior of building with window and wall as "infill"; three steel windows in each bay; exposed concrete sills; steel H section columns; concrete deck; post 1920 survey, pre 1929.

**Buildings #43 #53, #62, #63:**

Miscellaneous secondary buildings, pump houses, gas storage houses, incinerators, sheds; mainly later dates.

# 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"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
			<input type="checkbox"/> science
			<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
			<input type="checkbox"/> social/
			<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
			<input type="checkbox"/> theater
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1909-1939

Builder/Architect William Steele

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Lee Tire plant is a monument to the achievement of one of Conshohocken's most ambitious citizens, J. Ellwood Lee, who founded not one but two great businesses within a mile of each other in his native city. Moreover, the Lee Tire plant is of enormous interest in the history of American industry, marking as it does the coming of age of automated manufacturing of a highly standardized product -- automobile tires. The puncture proof pneumatic tire was an innovation which as much as any in automotive history helped put the nation on wheels by eliminating or at least reducing the likelihood of a blowout. It joined a line of significant innovations in tire manufacturing that made Lee Tire one of the giants of its industry. Finally, the Lee Tire plant is an exceptional work of industrial architecture, one that describes the process of manufacture by the clarity of its spatial organization, but also is an imposing architectural design by one of the most important industrial architectural firms of its day, William Steele. It was they who created the familiar separated administration building, dominated by its great clock tower that for three quarters of a century has made the Lee Tire building one of the prominent landmarks of the Philadelphia/Conshohocken region.

The regional impact of the Lee Tire plant arises out of the role in the economy of Conshohocken. By the early 20th century that town had become a significant center of heavy industry, drawn initially by the presence of the canal, with a woolen mill, tube works, steel rolling mills and the like along the river front. It was in that community that J. Ellwood Lee, founder of the company, established an earlier business, the JELCO manufactory of bandages, splints and other medical supplies. From that business, Lee made his first fortune, one which enabled him to build a mansion, "Leeland", on Fayette Street (the Municipal Building since 1964). A few blocks from the house is the JELCO factory which Lee sold to Johnson & Johnson of New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1905. Though Lee became a vice president in that company, his interests remained in Conshohocken. Four years later he began the Lee Tire Company, which relied on materials and processes from the bandage and splint trade which he quickly applied to the question of automobile tires. When Lee died in 1914, Lee Tire was on the threshold of creating the "Lee Puncture Proof Pneumatic Tire", and Lee Tire was employing 900 people.

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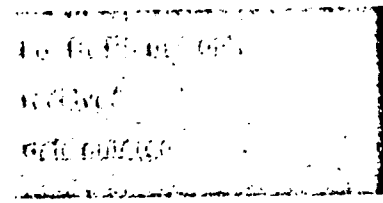
The Lee Tire Company quickly grew into one of the giants of its industry, spurred by the production of that tire, which was advertised in The Philadelphia Yearbook of 1917. In 1915 the company created a marketing subsidiary, "Lee Tire and Rubber of New York"; from that point on, some of the major trade name tires of the nation were produced: "Stag Hound", an early solid tire; "Shoulderbuilt", an early balloon tire with the "level weld inner tube" that eliminated tire "thump" and permitted high speed travel. Carbon black added to the rubber for improved tire wear was another invention of the 1940s, pioneered in the Lee plant in Conshohocken. Though the last "puncture proof" tire was made in 1936, other products had taken its place; nine years later, at the end of World War II, Lee was employing nearly 2000 workers in 700,000 square feet of factory, producing 10,000 tires -- per day! That speed was made possible by automated manufacturing processes that began with mechanized presses and injection molding machines and culminated with an automated mixing plant.

In 1965 the company was crippled by a massive strike that led to its takeover by Goodyear. Though investments were made in the plant, including the northwestern wing, the company was less able to compete in its aging plant. With the switch from bias ply to radial tires, Lee fell behind its competitors, and like Pottstown's Firestone plant closed its regional center in 1978. After six decades it was reduced to being a trade name for Goodyear, distributed from Kansas City. On the other hand, the buildings of the Lee Tire complex survived to maintain what had become one of the major architectural landmarks of its region. That in part is a tribute to the vast size of the administration building, but also to its siting. It is located on a bend of the Schuylkill River that has a corresponding curve in the Schuylkill Expressway which is now called "The Lee Tire Curve" because the Lee plant is the dominant landmark.

Fortunately the buildings themselves have additional interest as well, for they are the work of one of the principal industrial architects of the early 20th century, William Steele and Sons. Steele's firm began in 1864 as a construction office and by the 1890s was one of the earliest users of reinforced concrete. Though their pioneering work has not been explored in the recent studies of the material, it is clear that by the 1890s, Steele was designing and building factories that were constructed using concrete framing on the column and beam system -- a system which he used in the administration building. The firm designed a number of well-known structures in the region, including the core building of the new 69th Street

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district, the McClatchey Building, the monumental Reading Freight and Commerce Terminal at 401 N. Broad, and the fondly remembered Shibe Park (later Connie Mack Stadium).

In this instance, the Lee Tire plant takes three separate forms, each of which are highly visible and identifiable. The most identifiable is of course the Administration Building, which stretches the full width of the initial factory site. Its symmetrical form with central tower flanked by side wings and terminated with end towers, its light color, and its oversized clock on the central tower grab attention, while forming a dignified image for the factory. Contrasting with it and focussing the work entrance is the great water tower that Steele made memorable by shaping its rubble stone into a gothic crenellated tower lighted by traceried lancet windows. Views in the early advertisements of the factory always show the water tower behind the administration block. The last and equally awesome image is the manufacturing portion which attains the Piranesian scale of modern architecture. Its vast columned halls, its immense hoppers and conveyors, and its surviving automated machinery are sufficient to recall the heroic power of modern industrial America. Factories such as this made the Philadelphia region the center of manufacturing for the nation. Though the original users have left, the intended factory outlet use of the space will provide an opportunity for the public to experience the vast size and raw architectural power of those factories.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

"The Lee Way:", October, 1983, Volume 18:10 (company newspaper)  
"History of the Lee Tire and Rubber Company of Pennsylvania:", 14 August, 1942  
The Rubber Industry in the U.S.A., Rubber Manufacturers Association, Madison Avenue NY  
S.B. Bedford, "Making of Auto Tires", Scientific American, Vol. 68: 312-14, Nov. 3 1909  
(continued)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 17

Quadrangle name Norristown Quad

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	4	7	5	3	7	0	4	4	3	5	9	0	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

1	8	4	7	5	3	4	0	4	4	3	6	0	8	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

1	8	4	7	6	2	6	0	4	4	3	6	1	7	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

1	8	4	7	5	4	3	0	4	4	3	6	2	0	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

1	8	4	7	5	5	4	0	4	4	3	6	0	2	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

1	8	4	7	5	6	0	0	4	4	3	5	9	2	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

see attached

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

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Montgomery code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

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

organization Clio Group, Inc.

date March 6, 1984

street & number 3961 Baltimore Avenue

telephone (215) 386-6276

city or town Philadelphia

state PA

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

For NPS use only

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

date \_\_\_\_\_

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date \_\_\_\_\_

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Zone		Easting					Northing							

B 

1	8	4	7	5	3	4	0	4	4	3	6	0	8	0
Zone		Easting					Northing							

C 

1	8	4	7	5	2	6	0	4	4	3	6	1	7	0
Zone		Easting					Northing							

D 

1	8	4	7	5	4	3	0	4	4	3	6	2	0	0
Zone		Easting					Northing							

E 

1	8	4	7	5	5	4	0	4	4	3	6	0	2	0
Zone		Easting					Northing							

F 

1	8	4	7	5	6	0	0	4	4	3	5	9	2	0
Zone		Easting					Northing							

G 

Zone		Easting					Northing							

H 

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State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer

title

date

7/12/84

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

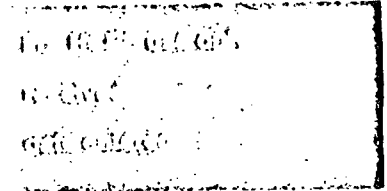
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Philadelphia Inquirer, 10 April 1914 (obituary)

"J. Elwood Lee", Biographical Annals of Montgomery County PA, Ellwood Roberts, editor, Volume 1, 1904; pp. 22-24

Henry Wilson Ruoff, Ph.D. "J. Ellwood Lee", Biographical Portrait, Cyclopedia of Montgomery County, Philadelphia 1895, pp. 270-280

Clifton Hunsiker, "J. Ellwood Lee", Montgomery County, A History, Lewis Publishing Company: New York, 1923 pp.295-298

Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, Philadelphia Yearbook, 1918-1919, Philadelphia, 1919

New York Times, 11 April, 1914

Jean Toll and Michael Schwager, Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years, Volume I, Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983, pp. 132; Volume II "Lee Tire and Rubber Company", pp. 1337-38.

A History of the Lee Tire and Rubber Corporation of Pennsylvania, Conshohocken PA 1942

Lee Tire Company Archives, Valley Forge Corporate Center, Valley Forge PA

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Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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Lee Tire

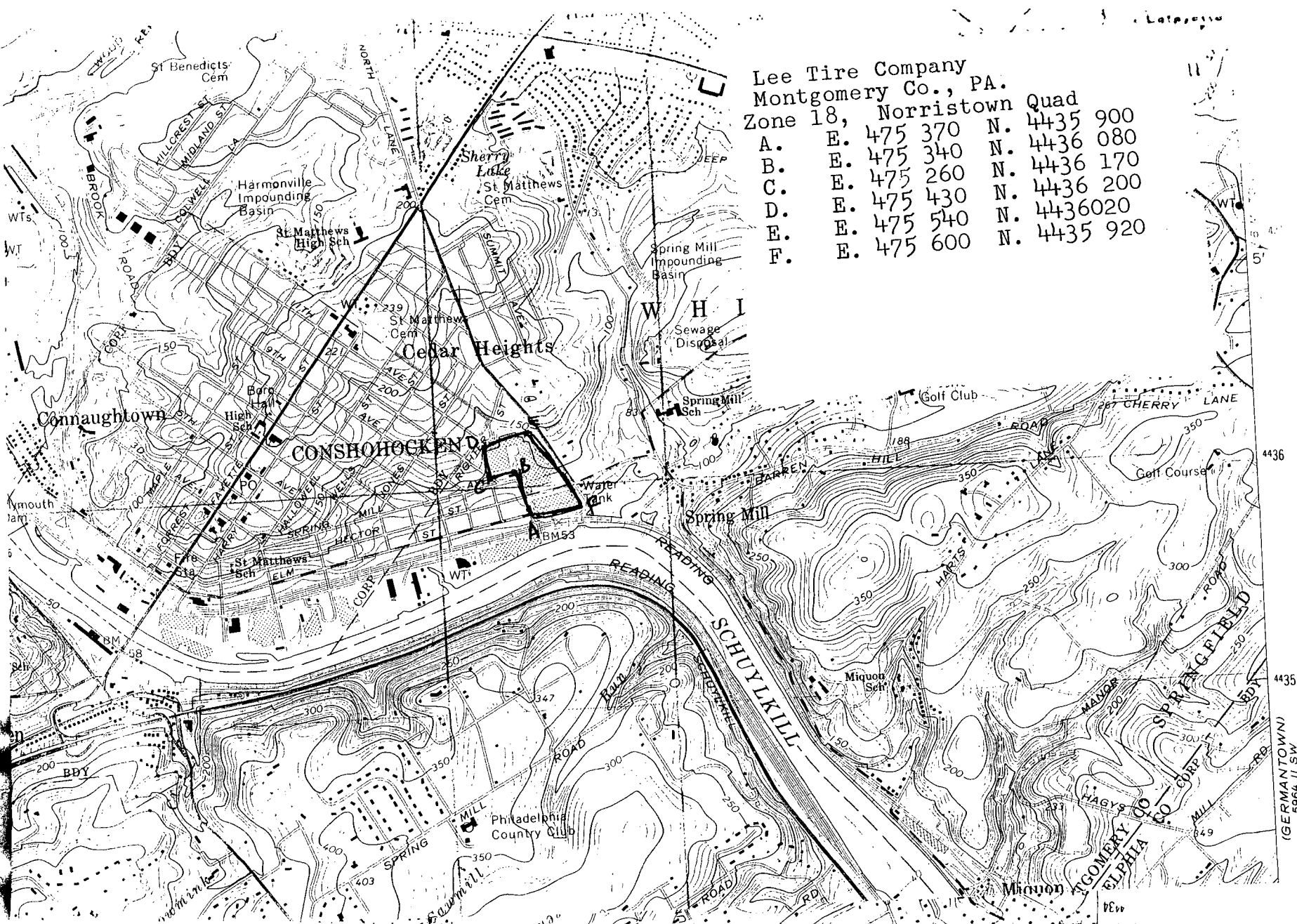
Item number

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Beginning at a point at the intersection of Hector and Lee Streets, running north along the line created by Lee Street to the south wall of Building #39; then east along the south wall to the intersection of Buildings #38 and #39; then north to the point where the north wall of Building #38 intersects the east wall of Building #39. Then continuing east along the north wall of Building #38 to the point where this line intersects North Lane; continuing southeast along North Lane to where North Lane intersects Hector Street; then west along Hector Street to a point where Hector Street intersects Lee Street, the place of beginning.



Lee Tire Company  
 Montgomery Co., PA.  
 Zone 18, Norristown

Zone	Easting	Northing	Quad
A.	E. 475 370	N. 4435	900
B.	E. 475 340	N. 4436	080
C.	E. 475 260	N. 4436	170
D.	E. 475 430	N. 4436	200
E.	E. 475 540	N. 4436	020
F.	E. 475 600	N. 4435	920

(GERMANTOWN)  
 5964 11 SW