

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 West Middletown Historic District

and or common N/A

2. Location

street & number Main Street

not for publication

city, town West Middletown Borough vicinity of N/A

state Pennsylvania

code 042

county Washington

code 125

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	n/a in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input 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 n/a

city, town n/a

vicinity of n/a

state n/a

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Washington County Courthouse

street & number Main Street

city, town Washington

state PA 15301

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title n/a

has this property been determined eligible? n/a yes no

date n/a

federal state county local

depository for survey records n/a

city, town n/a

state

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Records indicate that West Middletown began to develop as a commercial community in the mid-1790s. Its location - along a high ridge, surrounded by rich farmlands, a day's journey by horse and buggy from Washington, Pennsylvania and a similar distance from Wellsburg, West Virginia on the Ohio River - made it a logical location for tradesmen and professional people. Today, even though the Historic District is residential, its physical size, the number and style of the buildings, and its population have remained surprisingly unchanged.

State Route 844 slices the District in a clean, east-west direction and leaves the buildings snuggled against the sidewalk along the north and south sides of the highway. On the north side of the District the land drops abruptly into a valley then extends into rolling farmlands and forests that stretch to the horizon. To the west, south and east farmlands surround the community.

There are 49 buildings in the District: 41 are residential; 8 are non-residential. The oldest known building dates to 1798: 31 buildings are circa 1800-1850; 16 are circa 1851-1900. One structure, the firehall, was built after 1900.

Twenty-one of the buildings are brick; 21 are frame; the remainder are a combination of log and frame, or log with clapboard or contemporary siding. Although some of the homes/structures have had some modification or alteration (a porch removed or added, windows replaced, etc.) most of the buildings are in good-excellent, contributing-significant condition. One structure, the firehall, is an intrusion.

Most of the homes/structures in the Historic District are classic vernacular interpretations. They are spare, plain, conservative, devoid of elaborate decoration, with only a few simple details that hint at a specific style. Only one, a handsome, asymmetrical, Italianate home, stands apart in a bold, slightly florid, declaration of style.

Most of the buildings in the District are detached structures, however, there are four clusters of row house/business configurations. Occasionally, adjacent buildings share a common chimney, even though the buildings were erected many years apart.

In most instances homes hug the sidewalk, seldom more than a few feet from the curbline. Front yards are rare. Lots are generally long and narrow, often no wider than the width of the house or building. Occasionally, a lot will feed into a larger, irregularly shaped, several acre plot.

The majority of the buildings in the Historic District were built as a combination home and business, shop, or inn. Home and business were so well integrated, and the architectural style was so accommodating, that few homes have obvious storefront architectural detail. One notable clue is the presence of two "front" doors or entrances on many of the homes: one door originally led to the business, the second to private quarters.

A few of the buildings in the District were built, and still exist, as purely business structures. A general store, tin shop, blacksmith/wagon shop, and a stable, all stand looking just as they did in the nineteenth century. None is being used for its original purpose.

One of the elements that helps unify the District and contributes to its special appeal is the abundance of non-structural, nineteenth century detail: wrought iron fences; sandstone curbs; flagstone sidewalks; hand cut stone rain gutters; and stone upping-blocks. These details, like the buildings, are sometimes neglected, but they exist - not for effect - naturally, unselfconsciously...the warp in the fabric of the town.

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

Specific dates 1798-1900 Builder/Architect unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

West Middletown is perhaps the most well-preserved example of a nineteenth century rural commercial community in western Pennsylvania. The tiny (pop. 190), cluster of plain, sturdy, vernacular buildings still echoes what it once was: a stopover and supply point midway between Washington, Pennsylvania and the Ohio River town of Wellsburg, West Virginia. The town's unified appearance, its tempo, texture, and architectural integrity are exceptional. Even the farmlands and forests that surround the community are essentially as they were over 100 years ago.

Remnants are everywhere of a time when home and business shared a common structure; when transportation meant horse and buggy; when self-sufficiency ruled; and all of life's necessities, and a few frivolities, were a stroll away.

Two factors, modest prosperity and a conservative Scots-Irish heritage, have contributed to the preservation of the town's beauty and homogeneous nature. With the exception of the firehall, no building has been erected within the Historic District since 1900. "Modernization" has been scant because most did not/do not have the funds, nor the inclination, to "fix what don't need fixin'." Even where insulbrick or aluminum siding covers an old log or frame building the basic form remains and the siding becomes an honest attempt at caring for, rather than remodeling, the structure.

At its peak, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, West Middletown was a linear cluster of homes and businesses strung compactly along a well-travelled road. Today, in several instances, homes and commercial structures stand side-by-side in almost continuous-architecture fashion: hotel/shop/home/general store. Only 10 homes or structures have been lost since the turn of the century, its physical format and flavor have remained essentially the same for over 80 years.

Because so much of the original home/business architecture was "generic", buildings were used interchangeable for a variety of purposes. Thus, the business end of a home could have a metamorphoses from a tinship, to a merchantile establishment, to a post office, to a shoemaker's shop. When a business failed a home could absorb the business section in almost undetectable transformation.

Building property lines are long and narrow to accomodate the gardens and outbuildings that were necessary for a business community: stables, spring houses, wagon shops, out-houses, blacksmith shops, etc. Representative examples of all these buildings still exist, and many are still use. With a few minor exceptions, current property lines are identical to those in the 1876 edition of Caldwell's Atlas - that map with corrections, is the one used for this survey.

West Middletown's contribution to history has always been within the context of the community's texture and character. For example: the Ralston Thrasher was invented nearby and manufactured here until a disastrous frost in June 1859 which left large shipments unused, and which caused bankruptcy for the company. Henry Ford visited West Middletown in 1932 and purchased the last known Ralston Thrasher (left abandoned in a pasture) for his museums in Deerfield Village.

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Continuation sheet West Middletown H.D.

Item number 10

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary lines of West Middletown Historic District are shown as a red dotted line on the accompanying map entitled West Middletown Borough.

Scale is 200 feet to the inch.

The northern boundary of the West Middletown Historic District begins at a point on the northern curb of State Route 844, 100 feet from the junction of Route 844 and Thompson Hill Road (LR 62022). It then proceeds north for 100 feet to the south curb of Thompson Hill Road, then west for 50 feet, then northwest for 125 feet to the north (rear) boundary line of Tax Parcel #690-012-00-00-0015-00. From this point it runs west, generally following the north (rear) boundary lines of 24 property lines, for 1600 feet to a point on the west (rear) boundary line of Tax Parcel #690-011-00-00-0006-00.

Next the line turns south for 150 feet to the curb of Route 844, then proceeds southwest for 25 feet until it meets the west side of Tax Parcel #690-007-00-00. It then goes south 150 feet to a point on the south (rear) boundary on same property. From this point it runs east generally following the property lines of 24 properties, for 1600 feet to a point on the south curb on Lane Barn Road; then proceeds north 150 feet to the point of origin.

Justification:

West Middletown is essentially a one street town. Main Street slices the town in a clean east-west direction. Farmlands about the property lines on all sides of the village. Joining the farms on the north is Cross Creek Lake and Parklands. The West Middletown Historic District is the core, the original site of the town...an additional 30 buildings (1900-1950) surround the edges of the Historic District.

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Continuation sheet West Middletown Historic Dist item number 8

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William McKeever, and his sons, Matthew and Thomas, were major forces behind the abolitionist movement in Western Pennsylvania, and were instrumental in helping to establish West Middletown as a stop on the Underground Railroad. The earliest known documented evidence of this involvement is from minutes of a two day "Anti-Slavery Meeting" which concluded on October 20, 1834. After a heated debate by the "Colonizationists" and the "Abolitionists" it was, "Resolved: That the Chairman appoint a committee of five persons to draught a Constitution and appoint a meeting for the purpose of forming an Anti-Slavery Society in this place (West Middletown)." Thomas McKeever was selected as one of the original five members chosen for this Committee. Several sources - letters, reminiscences, and news articles link John Brown and Matthew McKeever. John Brown, described in one account as "a tall, thoughtful gentleman, of pleasing address and considerable personal magnetism," is reported to have visited West Middletown several times "in his capacity as wool buyer." How much direct influence John Brown had on the Underground Railroad here is unknown.

Also unknown is whether the Underground Railroad had any direct relationship in the development of the African Methodist Episcopal Church which was formed here shortly after the Civil War. An A.M.E. congregation has been active here since the late 1860s.

West Middletown was incorporated as a borough in 1823. Thomas Gordon's book, A Gazeteer of Pennsylvania, states that the town contained "40 or 50 dwellings, 3 taverns and 1 store in 1832." Apparently Gordon listed only the most prominent businesses because deeds indicate that by the mid 1830s West Middletown was an important stop for merchants, travellers, drovers, and farmers, and the last leg of a journey to the Ohio River. It had become, in effect, one-buggy-shop, rural shopping center: general stores, taverns, inns, tinsmiths, cobblers, saddlers, hatters, and butchers. There were doctors to tend the newly born, and tombstone cutters to honor the dearly departed. Strangely, the community was never more than modestly prosperous. However, West Middletown was important, vital even, to travellers and farmers. But it was important during a time when "important" didn't need to be huge, sprawling, complicated or hectic.

Local journalists and writers have said that West Middletown is a "microcosm of the nineteenth century." In a real sense it is. The nineteenth century formed it, and the twentieth century froze it. The horse and buggy brought the town into being, and 150 years later the automobile drove business and people away. But the town didn't die. A stern heritage of pride and practicality, and an entanglement of family histories that can travel back several generations, has kept the town alive, if not growing, and rich with a cohesive, unique glimpse at what a small, rural, commercial town once looked like.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Land grants, deeds, tax records: County Courthouse, Washington, PA
Deeds, tax records, photos, etc: McKeever Study Library Association, West Middletown, PA
Letters, recollections (written), photographic archives: Private collection of a resident of West Middletown, PA

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property 17.9 acres

Quadrangle name West Middletown

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	7	5	4	9	1	0	0	4	4	5	4	6	9	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

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

C

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

D

1	7	5	4	8	5	8	0	4	4	5	4	7	4	0
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 N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bob Carter

organization Washington Co. History & Landmarks Foundation date 1984

street & number PO Box 274 telephone 412-222-8140

city or town Washington state PA 15301

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 _____

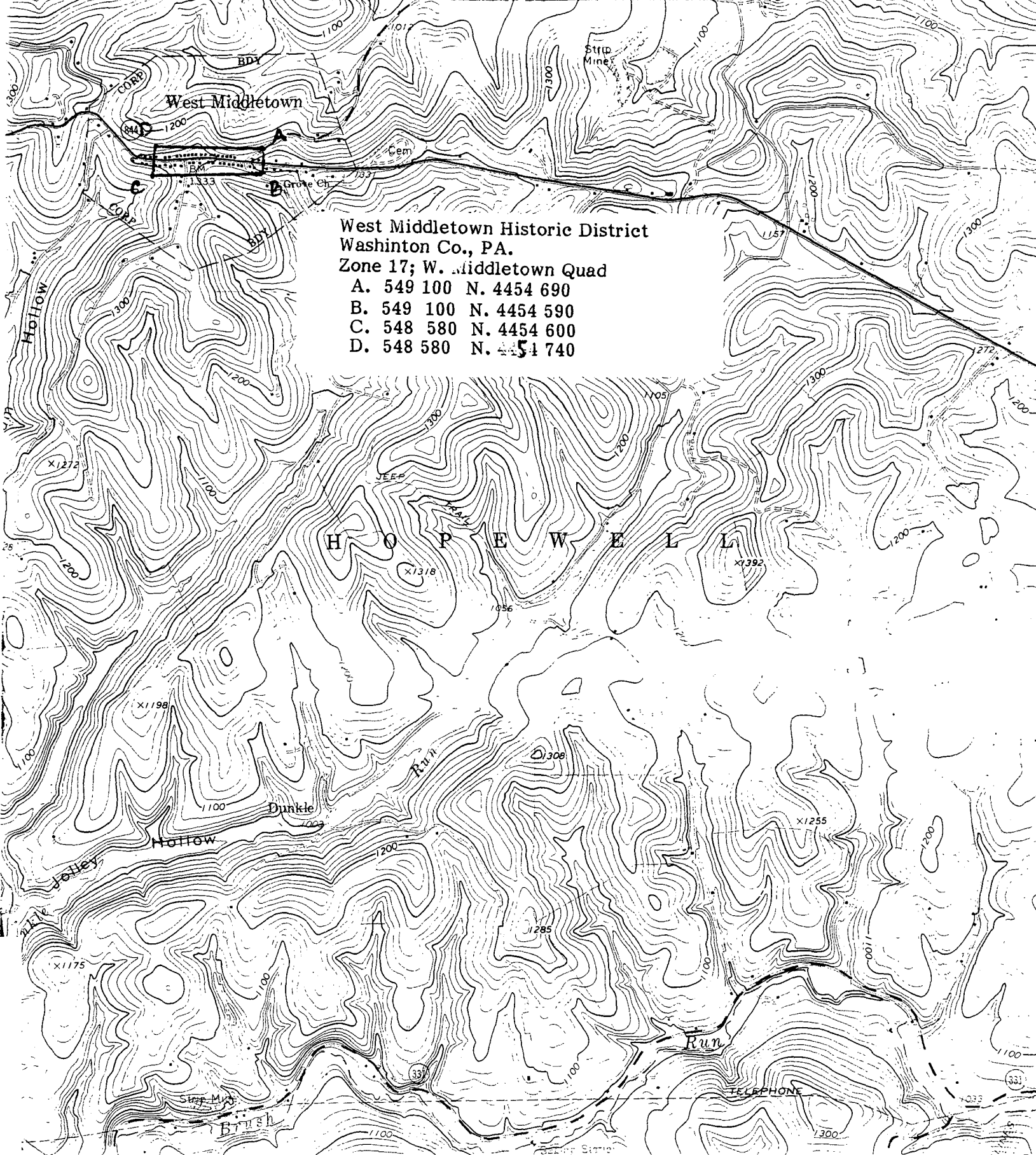
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

V SW
LLA) 548 549 25' BUFFALO 6 Mi 1 260 000 FEET 551 552



**West Middletown Historic District
Washington Co., PA.**

Zone 17; W. Middletown Quad

- A. 549 100 N. 4454 690
- B. 549 100 N. 4454 590
- C. 548 580 N. 4454 600
- D. 548 580 N. 4454 740