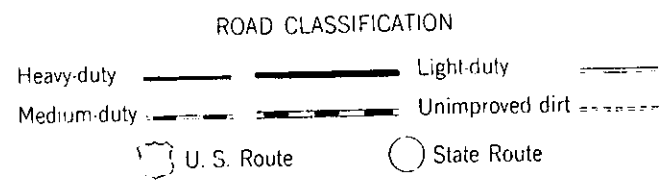
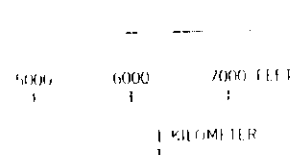
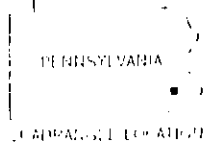


Gay Street School
 Chester County
 Zone 18 E455880 N44



EFT
 JM OF 1929



PHOENIXVILLE, PA.
 N4007.5—W7530/7.5

1955
 PHOTO REPRODUCED IN 1973
 AMS 5864 II NE—SERIES V831

ACCURACY STANDARDS
 STON. VIRGINIA 22092
 THIS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

40°07'30"

75°30'

VALLEY FORGE
 5.964 MI SW

VALLEY FORGE 3.7 MI
 PENNSYLVANIA TURNPIKE 7.3 MI
 DEVAULT 4.4 MI
 WEST CHESTER 14 MI

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

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

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

1. Name

historic Gay Street School

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number SE Corner of Gay Street & Morgan Street N/A not for publication

city, town Phoenixville N/A vicinity of

state Penna. code 42 county Chester code 029

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Gay Street Professional Associates

street & number Box 128

city, town Birchrunville N/A vicinity of state PA 19421

5. Location of Legal Description

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

street & number High Street

city, town West Chester state PA 19380

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Chester Co. Hist. Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1982 federal state county local

depository for survey records Chester County Historical Society

city, town West Chester state PA 19380

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Standing on the Southeast corner of Gay and Morgan Streets, this brick building faces North and sets in the middle of a large town lot. It is a three sectioned two and three story structure which was built in two stages, the first in 1874 and the second in 1883. It has had no structural additions or alterations since that date. The building sets on a 57,064 square foot lot in what was in 1874 a new section of town. It is surrounded by houses of either Second Empire or Queen Anne design, almost all executed in brick. The streets are tree lined, but the school yard has given up its original shade to macadam which will be modified in the present plans of reuse.

FIRST SECTION - 1874 - Four Rooms (See floor plan)

The 1874 section is the west wing which provided four classrooms, two per floor, and a hallway. It is 60'10" by 49'8" and has four bays on each of three sides. The fourth side, the east wall, was used to attach the 1883 addition. A main entrance was in the middle of this wall, which was used for the middle hallway created by the transverse center section of the addition. (See General Construction below)

SECOND SECTION - 1883 - Ten Rooms (See floor plan)

The 1883 addition, was first intended to add four more classrooms and would have simply extended the building to the east. However, it was decided to provide for future needs by adding a center section between the east and west two story wings. This was done by designing a three bay, three-story structure to stand between the two-story wings. To give extra light to the center rooms, the transverse middle section was extended the depth of one double bay beyond the wing facades on both the north and south sides. This shapes the building in the form of a cross. Entrances are balanced in the innermost bay of each wing and are identical on the north and south sides.

GENERAL CONSTRUCTION FEATURES Found in Both Sections

The brick construction of the building recesses each window in a panel created by the use of brick columns. The basement is half above ground making that area usable and bright. The wings feature a broad 4-in-12 gable roof. A wide overhang in the Italianate fashion of the period is dressed and supported by wooden brackets used in pairs. The center section of the building carries the height and repeats the brick design panels but is hip roofed. The roof is standing seam tin. The trussed timber clear-span roof structure with a central tension rod to support the ceilings below (as per photo) clearly indicates that the building was designed on engineering principles showing a progression beyond the Master Carpenter technique which had built most of the buildings up to that time.

INTERIOR FEATURES - Both Sections

Each classroom has five windows and high ceilings in the style of the schools then being built making it a great improvement over earlier schools. The two wing hallways are internally connected by an arched hallway in the middle of the center section. Windows are double hung 4/4 sash, with the top an elliptical curve following the flat arch of the opening. The entire building makes use of tongue and groove wainscoting and chair rail. The building was equipped with gas lights, some of the jets and piping remaining.

CLOCK AND BELL TOWER

The clock was purchased from and installed by the Howard Clock Company of Boston, Mass. for \$600. Its fine brass workings were a source of pride to the town fathers, the Church Street School clock being cast iron. A news clip of 1883 states: "Instead of the heavy cast iron machinery ... we found the new one to be neat and compact ... and the works, which are all of brass, are as nicely finished as those of a Frodsham watch, and is warranted to keep as good time ..." The clock operated on its original mechanism for 68 years. In 1951, for convenience, it was electrified by the Tower Clock Service Company of Springfield, Ohio. Until then, the clock had been run by a weight system that required hand winding twice a week. It is still an excellent time keeper.

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 type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" 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 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 1874 Add. 1883 **Builder/Architect -Designer** Col. Nathaniel M. Ellis

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Gay Street School exerted a strong influence for 90 years on the educational climate of Phoenixville. Built in 1874, it was the second large school house erected in Phoenixville to accommodate a growing number of children. The first building of any size was Church Street School and it has been razed to one floor losing all semblance of its original appearance. Even though the Public School Act of 1834 had made each municipality responsible for the education of all its children, schools remained small one or two room buildings for 20 years or more. Phoenixville had complied with a one room building in the north ward in 1835 and one in the south ward in 1836. Not until 1871, however, was another law passed which allowed school boards the right to borrow money and float bonds. This law benefitted districts such as Phoenixville wherein the number of children greatly exceeded the number of taxables. Plans for Gay Street School were implemented immediately thereafter.

West Chester, county seat of Chester County, was the leader in local education, drawing on its early Quaker background. For many years, West Chester and Phoenixville (which had a strong Mennonist core equally interested in education) carried the banner for new trends in education. As early as 1850, they were the only places in the county where night schools were conducted, and as late as 1862 were the only graded schools in the county. A law officially creating night schools as part of the state system was not enacted until 1883. The year Gay Street School was built, 1874, West Chester had four schools and Phoenixville had three when other towns in the county were still struggling to get one.

Projecting the need for larger schools, Phoenixville authorized purchase of two lots of land in 1857, one on Church Street and one from the John Morgan farm, both lots in the growing south side of the town. Divided into two wards by French Creek, Phoenixville, the second largest town in Chester County, held its early population in the north ward where a stuccoed stone building was built and adapted to changing needs. The south ward was growing and a four room one-floor schoolhouse with a cut stone front was built on the Church Street lot in 1860. It was enlarged into two floors a few years later with a clock and belfry. This building remained until 1960 when it was sold and razed to one floor by a fire company for activities.

Aided by the 1871 school law allowing school boards authority to mortgage and float bonds, Phoenixville's board acted on an authorization of 1867 to build on the Gay and Morgan Street lot. The Annual Report of 1869 by the County Superintendent of Common Schools stated: "... There are in Phoenixville more children to be educated in proportion to the amount of property taxable for school purposes than in any other district in the county ..."

In September, 1873, a Committee on Design was appointed and the lot was 'graded down'. Drafts for the building were drawn by Col. Nathaniel M. Ellis who was an engineer, thrice Burgess of Phoenixville, and General Agent for the Reading Railroad Company in Phoenixville. Thought was given to such new concerns as adequate and circulating ventilation for the students, ample gas light for low light days, fireproof construction, coal burning central heat that would obviate the need for classroom stoves, inside piped water, and a particular love of the times - another clock tower and belfry.

Gay Street School served as elementary school, then elementary school and high school until 1911 when a separate high school was built. It continued as an elementary school from 1911 to 1964 at which time it was closed and classes were transferred to the Samuel K. Barkley School on Second Avenue. In its prime, it was considered one of the larger and one of the

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better equipped schools in the region. The new building was so well received that it was thought well to make the Gay Street building the center of school administration in the town. And so it was for many years. For a time, it was the only building in the Borough which could provide education from grade one through grade twelve.

The "new" school was at the edge of the growing town in 1874 but was soon to be surrounded by substantial homes. It has maintained its full corner lot since its inception and has had no changes in site, size or decoration since that time except the town fire code requirement of outside fire escapes for the three story section, and the railing atop the clock tower. It has become a landmark to the Borough of Phoenixville. No changes in its exterior appearance or its interior basic layout are proposed by the current owner. Each classroom will be used in tact as an apartment or office. Wainscotting, chair rail and ceiling heights will not be changed and hall space will remain true to its original design.

The significance of Gay Street School is in its remarkably mint, intact and undisturbed condition dated from 1874. Architecturally, it appears today as it was designed by Col. N. M. Ellis with no abstractions or alterations other than the loss of its belfry. It is the only school building still standing in Phoenixville, or its neighboring towns, from this early era.

To education in the town and in the county, it carries a prideful past of having been in the forefront of teaching methods and a main rung in the evolving educational system of the area. Phoenixville and West Chester Schools were considered the best in the county and often reported in Philadelphia newspapers. As the functioning center of Phoenixville schools for 90 years, Gay Street School speaks strongly to its own significance.

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The contract for construction was let to John Yeager in September, 1874, for the price of \$9,700 and the building was ready for occupancy by January, 1875. Scarcely eight years later, this four room building was no longer adequate and a ten room addition was built onto the east wall. There have been no additions since that date.

The bell was still in place in 1980-81, when demolition of the school was considered. The idea of demolition was rejected but the wooden enclosure for the bell was lost somewhere between 1920 and 1970. The bell and iron holding structure was removed by the Phoenixville Area School District at the time of the most recent sale. "Tower alterations" are the result of loss of the belfry. As shown in the early photograph, the belfry sat atop the clock tower. When it was removed, a wooden gallery or railing was built to finish off the appearance. The tower has not otherwise been altered.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1.31 acres

Quadrangle name Phoenixville

Quadrangle scale 1"-2000'
1:24000'

UTM References

A 18 455880 4442140
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

From the center cross of Gay and Morgan Streets southerly 232'6" along Gay Street; thence 90° easterly 245'; thence 90° northerly 233'4" to Morgan Street; thence 90° westerly 245' to the place of Beginning.

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 Estelle Cremers, Eleanor M. Morris

organization French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, Inc.

date January 28, 1983

street & number Box 360 - R.D. 2

telephone 215-469-0150

city or town Pottstown,

state PA 19464

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 _____

Chief of Registration