

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DEC 13 1987

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

HISTORIC RECORDS

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Grays Road Recreation Center
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 2501 Christian Street N/A not for publication
city, town Philadelphia N/A vicinity
state Pennsylvania code 42 county Philadelphia code 101 zip code 19146

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official Brent Glass, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

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): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL / civic
EDUCATION/school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

7. DescriptionArchitectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls brick

roof asphalt

other wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Grays Road Recreation Center, constructed in 1926-1927 from the design of John T. Windrim, is located at the northeast corner of Christian and Stillman Streets in Philadelphia. The building occupies a portion of a larger parcel of land that originally included a playground area located east of the recreation center. The former playground is presently occupied by a series of newly constructed townhouses, which are excluded from this nomination. The recreation center recently underwent rehabilitation for residential use. This work entailed some exterior alterations, as well as reconfiguration of some interior spaces. Nevertheless, the building continues to display a good level of overall integrity. The nominated property contains one contributing building.

The Grays Road Recreation Center is a rectangular-plan, two and one-half story brick building designed in the Colonial Revival style. The building's gabled roof, clad in composition shingles, is penetrated by two internal brick chimneys, located on the ridge line at the north gable end and set back approximately twenty-five feet from the south gable end. Seven pedimented dormers penetrate the face of the roof on both the east and west elevations. The dormers, each fitted with a double-hung 6/6 sash, are sided with composition shingles. A molded, pressed metal cornice, with partial returns, finishes the roofline.

The building is constructed of red brick, laid in Flemish bond. A molded brick watertable serves to denote the base of the building. The principal (south) facade fronts onto Christian Street. This symmetrical five-bay gable elevation contains a centrally placed arched entry, with deep reveals, that is reached by five stone steps. The archway is ornamented with a stone surround and ornamental stone keystone that serve to identify this opening as the building's principal entry. Recent rehabilitation work, based upon the original drawings of architect John T. Windrim, reconstructed the wood paneling that originally lined the reveals of this opening and resulted in the replacement of modern non-historic metal entry doors with the present double-leaf, glazed wooden doors. The building entry is flanked by two rectangular window openings, with flat arched brick lintels with stone keystones, and wooden sills. Each window opening is fitted with a 12/12 double-hung sash. The second story window openings are also

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DESCRIPTION (continued)

rectangular, with flat arched brick lintels and wooden sills. These windows are fitted with 8/12 double-hung sash. The first and second story openings are separated by brick panels formed of enframed headers. A semi-circular fanlight window, with a brick arch and stone keystone, is centered in the gable. This window is fitted with a fixed, multi-light sash.

The nine-bay east facade originally fronted onto the recreation center's playground. A brick wall along Christian Street partially screens this facade from the street. Windrim echoed the five-bay arrangement of the south facade by setting the five central bays of this facade within blind brick arches. The arches are emphasized by stone keystones and imposts. All arches, with the exception of the southernmost, are infilled with rectangular window openings, with flat arched brick lintels with stone keystones, and wood sills. The window openings contain double-hung 12/12 sash. The southernmost arch contains a rectangular entry, with double-leaf glazed wooden doors and a rectangular transom sash. At the second story, rectangular window openings are located directly above the blind arches. These windows, with flat arched brick lintels and wooden sills, are fitted with 8/12 double-hung sash. The window opening directly above the building entry is blind, infilled with a slightly recessed panel of brick. Roof dormers are located directly above these five central openings.

Two bays flank the five-bay central section of the east facade to the north and south. These flanking bays are detailed in the same fashion as on the principal (south) elevation, with 12/12 double-hung sash at the first story and 8/12 double-hung sash at the second story. Brick panels of enframed headers separate the two stories. A single roof dormer is centered between the two bays, further differentiating these flanking elements from the facade's central five-bay section.

The building's west facade, which fronts onto Stillman Street, is, with two exceptions, identical in appearance to the east facade. Unlike the east facade there is no building entry on the west facade. The bay occupied by an entry on the east facade is filled by a rectangular window with a 12/12 double-hung sash, identical to the other bays of the facade's five-bay central section. The second story window opening

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directly above this window is not blank, as on the east facade, but is fitted with an 8/12 double-hung sash.

Recent rehabilitation work involved the creation of three basement entries along the building's east facade. These sunken entries were created by enlarging small existing lightwells located north of the building entry on this facade. The lightwells were enlarged to provide for access to new glazed entry doors flanked by metal casements. This work is almost wholly below grade, minimizing its impact upon the building.

The building's north elevation is largely obscured by a simple metal fire escape. Double-hung 8/12 and 6/6 sash are interspersed with doors that provide access to the fire escape. All openings on this facade have flat arched brick lintels.

The interior of the building is rather plainly finished, with detailing that reflects the Colonial Revival style exterior. The main entry, off of Christian Street, opened into an entrance hall detailed with painted paneled wainscoting and a molded wood cornice. Four small rooms, originally used for offices and storage, flanked the entrance hall. A fireplace, with a simple marble surround and a paneled chimneypiece is located on the north wall of the entry hall directly opposite the entry door. Arched openings flank the fireplace. The west opening led to the lower floor of a two-story gymnasium, measuring fifty by seventy-five feet, that originally occupied most of the northern portion of the basement and first floor. In 1963 contractor T. S. Keefer, Jr. floored over the gymnasium at the first floor level, effectively destroying the space. Nevertheless, some original detailing, including twelve Doric columns, presently shared between the basement and first floors, survive. The arched opening to the east of the fireplace led onto a double, quarter-turn stair, with two landings, that connects the first and second floors.

A two-story auditorium, measuring fifty by thirty feet, and complete with a Colonial Revival style proscenium, fireplace, and balcony overlooking the stage, occupied the southern portion of the building's second floor. The northern portion of this floor contained offices and playrooms arranged along a double-loaded corridor. Detailing in this

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area was limited to simple wooden chair rails, baseboards, paneled doors, and built-in cabinets.

The third floor, reached by means of a dog leg stair, contained residential quarters for the recreation center's staff. These rooms were utilitarian, and devoid of architectural detail.

The recent rehabilitation of the building entailed its conversion into fourteen apartment units. The entrance hall was retained intact and converted into a residential unit by the addition of a kitchen, with floating partition walls, in one corner of the space. The side rooms off of the entrance hall now function as bedrooms. The gymnasium space, previously altered by the insertion of a floor, was subdivided into a series of two-story apartments that occupy both the basement and first floor levels. The glazed brick exterior walls and Doric columns that characterized the previously subdivided gymnasium space were retained intact. The second floor auditorium was retained largely intact, with one unit created on the stage area and a second in the auditorium space. This second unit incorporates the original fireplace and balcony that occupied this space. The second floor corridor was retained intact, with apartment units introduced into the former office and playroom spaces behind the corridor walls. Original architectural details, including chair rails, baseboard, doors, and cabinetry, were retained where possible. The third floor residential area presently functions as three separate apartment units, a minimal change from the original use of this space.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
architecture
entertainment/recreation
education
social history

Period of Significance
1926-1938

Significant Dates
1926-1927

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person

Architect/Builder
Windrim, John I.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Constructed in 1926-1927, the Grays Road Recreation Center is an important example of the activities of the Richard Smith Family Trust. The Smith Family Trust constituted Philadelphia's first and largest charitable institution established solely to provide for the recreational and educational needs of children. The Trust's programs drew upon the ideology of Progressive Era reformers, most specifically those associated with the Settlement House Movement and the Philadelphia Model Playgrounds Movement. The Grays Road Recreation Center is the last surviving example of four Smith Family Trust playgrounds established to serve the needs of children in specific neighborhoods. It was the only Smith Family Trust neighborhood center designed specifically as a recreational building. In addition, the building is an unusual example of the work of noted Philadelphia architect John Torrey Windrim.

The Richard Smith Family Trust was created by the wills of Richard Smith and his wife, Sarah, in memory of their son, Stanfield. Richard Smith, who earned his fortune as a partner in the firm of MacKellar, Smiths & Jordan Company, founders of printing type, died in 1894. His will directed the Fidelity Trust Company, named as Trustees of the estate, to "erect a proper building and enclose a children's playground in such portion of Fairmount Park as might be designated by the Park Commissioners" (Valentine 1925:3). Sarah Smith, who died shortly after her husband, bequeathed her residuary estate in trust to the Fidelity Trust Company for the purpose of maintaining the playhouse and its grounds.

The Smiths' efforts to memorialize their son and provide for the recreational needs of Philadelphia's children dovetail with broader patterns of social reform that arose in the last decade of the nineteenth century as part of the Progressive Movement. The Progressives succeeded during the years prior to World War I in implementing significant social, political, and economic changes in

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SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

American society. Fundamental to Progressive ideology was an assumed social responsibility for those of means to assist the less fortunate. This constituted a rejection of Social Darwinism and Herbert Spencer's notions of the survival of the fittest.

Two important social reform movements provided the foundation for the philosophical groundings of the Smith Family Trust. The Settlement House Movement (1889) and the Philadelphia Model Playground Movement (1893) were established in the Progressive spirit, with the intention of bringing about meaningful social change. The Settlement House Movement sought to improve the lot of the urban poor, particularly newly arrived European immigrants, through Americanization programs, establishment of public playgrounds, and institution of housing reforms. All of these activities reflected a basic Progressive belief in the key role that environment played in determining one's social lot. Progressive reformers believed that an improved environment, such as playgrounds for urban children, would help offset the detrimental influence of the street and mold children into proper citizens.

The Philadelphia Model Playground Movement, established in conjunction with the Culture Extension League in 1893, focused its efforts upon the recreational needs of children. Adherents of the Movement defined these needs in broad terms and attempted to do more than simply provide open spaces for play. They believed that play needed to be structured and guided in order to instill character and elevate the morals of the participants. The Movement viewed its activities as vital, along with the home, school, and church, to the production of properly socialized, morally upright, responsible citizens. As a result, the playgrounds advocated by the Movement included permanent facilities intended to provide children with opportunities for structured play and lessons in socialization.

Richard Smith was just one of those nineteenth century entrepreneurs who responded to the beliefs and social challenges of the Progressive reformers who established the Settlement House Movement and the Playground Movement. The Smith Family Trust combined Smith's recognition of the educational importance of play in the development of a child's moral values, creative talents, and self-expression with his desire to memorialize his dead son.

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In accordance with Smith's will, the Fidelity Trust Company hired local architect James H. Windrim to design a children's playhouse on a six-acre tract of Fairmount Park located just west of 33rd and Oxford Streets. The building was thrown open to the children of Philadelphia in July 1899. The Children's Playhouse, as the building is known, was an immediate success. Fully equipped with both indoor and outdoor play apparatus, it provided year round recreational programs for children from throughout the city. Programs at the Playhouse were not based upon continuing attendance because the clientele consisted largely of groups brought by schools and other social organizations for occasional visits. The facility, which survives today, hosted an average of 120,000 children per year during its first quarter century of operation.

The Playhouse operated as the only Trust facility for almost nineteen years. In 1912 the Trustees petitioned the Orphans' Court to permit the Smith Family Trust to establish recreation centers outside the boundaries of Fairmount Park. This request stemmed from a survey, conducted at the behest of the president of Fidelity Trust by the Playground and Recreation Association of Philadelphia, to assess Philadelphia's recreational needs. The survey's findings led the Trustees to conclude that the balance of the funds in their control could produce the greatest good by being used to establish playgrounds in congested city neighborhoods. In May 1917 the Orphans' Court granted the Trustees' petition and cleared the way for the establishment of Smith Family Trust playgrounds outside Fairmount Park.

In the summer of 1917 the Trust, working in conjunction with the Playground and Recreation Association of Philadelphia, toured the city in search of potential sites for their first new playgrounds. The first site selected was located in Northern Liberties. The Trust purchased a three quarter-acre site, including the old North Meeting House, at Sixth and Noble Streets in March 1918. The former Meeting House, constructed in 1838, was converted into a recreation building, additional houses on the property were razed, and the Northern Liberties Playground opened in August 1918.

In April 1918 the Trust purchased a three quarter-acre site, including an existing facility operated by the College Settlement, at Front and Lombard Streets. As with the Northern Liberties Playground, the Trust

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SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

did not build a new recreation center building, but simply converted existing buildings on the property into recreational facilities. The Front and Lombard facility, named Stanfield Playground in honor of Smith's son, opened in the summer of 1918.

The Smith Family Trust did not seek to establish a third neighborhood playground until 1922. In that year a survey of potential sites throughout the city revealed that the greatest need for recreational facilities lay in the area known as "The Pocket," an Irish working class enclave in southwest Center City located immediately south of the United States Naval Home. The residents of this area, which developed in the decades after 1850, labored in mills and factories along the Schuylkill River. They lived in small densely packed rowhouses that lined the narrow courts and alleys where their children played. The nearest playground was three-quarters of a mile away.

In November 1922 the Smith Family Trust purchased a tract bounded by Christian Street, Stillman Street, and the wall of the United States Naval Home, tore down the squalid house that occupied the property, and prepared a playground. The Grays Road Recreation Center opened in June 1923 with a registration of nearly eight hundred enthusiastic neighborhood children. A former distillery initially served as the playhouse.

In 1926 the Trust departed from their usual practice and decided to build a new playhouse at the Grays Road Recreation Center. Local architect John T. Windrim designed the new building, the only neighborhood playhouse operated by the Trust specifically designed as a recreational facility. When the new building opened in the fall of 1927 it offered handsome accommodations for the playground's various programs. Most of the building's basement and first floor were given over to a large, well-equipped gymnasium. The second floor contained a 250-seat playroom/theater, as well as several multi-purpose rooms that could be used for club meetings, games, and other passive play activities.

The Grays Road Recreation Center epitomized the work of the Smith Family Trust in Philadelphia's neighborhoods. The center offered sewing and home making classes, a Mother's Club, cooking classes, a basketball

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SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

league, a boxing club, swimming instruction, a dramatics group, a story telling group, a lending library, crime prevention workshops, and instruction on community life. These activities all contributed to the principal goals of the Trust, which entailed using play to mold the character and social relationships of the children. This philosophy was perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the program known as "The Village."

"The Village" program was adopted at all of the Smith Family Trust's neighborhood centers. It evolved from the realization that children frequently sought to duplicate and imitate the activities and social patterns of adult behavior in their play. The playground staff encouraged these activities, and provided a structured setting, including props and costumes, with which the children could construct their own communities. The staff helped the children establish stores, schools, banks, factories, hospitals, theaters, laundries, governments, and any other element from adult life that the children felt necessary. The children chose their own occupations according to their interests and the adult supervisors endeavored to assure that all Village activities were based on sound practices that would contribute to the proper socialization of the children. The Village experience encouraged children to take an active role in shaping their environment and taught them to work together to achieve their goals. The trustees of the Smith Family Trust considered these among the most valuable and meaningful lessons that they could instill in their young clients.

At the Grays Road Recreation Center the Village operated two afternoons each week in the building's second floor auditorium. The community established by the children reflected neighborhood standards of living and the children's awareness of home problems. Concern over problems of employment and money reflected the widespread poverty and unemployment of the surrounding community.

In 1932 the Smith Family Trust opened its fourth, and last, neighborhood playground in the old Frankford Meeting. As with all of the Trust's other neighborhood centers, with the exception of Grays Road, an existing building was converted for use as the playhouse. The Frankford Playground only survived until 1933, when financial pressures associated with the Great Depression forced its closure. In the following year, 1934, the Trust was forced to close the Northern Liberties Playground.

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Stanfield Playground survived until 1946, while the Grays Road Playground, the last survivor of the neighborhood playgrounds established by the Smith Family Trust, continued to serve neighborhood children until 1955. Only the Gray's Road Center building survives today among the Smith Family Trust neighborhood playgrounds.

The Grays Road Center is a significant example of the charitable activities of the Smith Family Trust. It is the sole surviving example of the four neighborhood playgrounds established by the Trust between 1918 and 1932, and was the only one of these facilities designed specifically as a recreation center. The Grays Road Center provided recreational facilities for an average of forty-one neighborhood children each day during its heyday in the 1930s. In 1935 128,048 children attended the center.

The neighborhood centers established by the Smith Family Trust existed firmly in the mainstream of Progressive Era social reform. They sought to take children from underprivileged neighborhoods and mold them into upstanding, moral citizens. The neighborhood orientation of the Grays Road Center, as epitomized in the ongoing Village program, distinguishes it from the Children's Playhouse in Fairmount Park, the only other surviving Smith Family Trust recreational facility. The Children's Playhouse served children from throughout the city and its programs did not rely upon regular attendance.

The architectural significance of the Grays Road Recreation Center stems from its association with John T. Windrim, a prominent Philadelphia architect, and from the fact that it was the only neighborhood facility constructed by the Smith Family Trust designed specifically as a recreation building.

Richard Smith's will specified that Philadelphia architect James H. Windrim, designer of the Philadelphia Masonic Temple (1868), serve as architect for all Smith Family Trust projects. Windrim's associations with the influential Stephen Girard Estate, which named him architect for all Estate projects in 1871, may have informed Smith's decision. In 1891 Windrim became Director of Public Works for the City of Philadelphia, and John Torrey Windrim assumed principal responsibility for his father's private practice. The elder Windrim designed the Children's Playhouse in Fairmount Park for the Smith Family Trust in

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1894, as well as the massive Smith Memorial Arch, honoring the Union generals of the Civil War, which was erected near Memorial Hall in 1897.

In 1919, with his father's death, all design responsibility for both the Girard Estate and the Smith Family Trust fell to John T. Windrim. In addition to his work for these charitable institutions, the younger Windrim designed a host of public and institutional buildings. His commissions include many projects for the City's fire and police departments, Bell Telephone, the Electric Company, Girard College, and various hospitals.

The Grays Road Recreation Center is somewhat atypical of the design modes used by John T. Windrim for most of his institutional, industrial, municipal, and public buildings. Windrim's designs generally reflect Beaux Arts Classical or Classical Utilitarian styles, and many of his buildings are impressive in their proportions and detailing. The Grays Road Recreation Center, in contrast, is a rather modest building, sympathetic to the scale of the neighborhood, that incorporates the needs of a modern recreational building into a Colonial Revival style envelope.

The design of the Grays Road Recreation Center clearly refers to the Quaker meeting houses that characterized the neighborhood playgrounds of the Smith Family Trust. Both the Northern Liberties and Frankford Playgrounds utilized former meeting houses, modified to suit the recreational needs of the neighborhood children. The Grays Road building uses Colonial Revival styling, detailing, and proportions to evoke a conscious connection to these earlier buildings. The image of the meeting house, with its connotations of a gathering place, provided a useful symbol for the Trust, which sought to make its neighborhood playgrounds gathering places for children. Moreover, the concept and image of the meeting house speak of the Quaker tenets of community obligation and service, a message that the Trust wished to convey to its new neighbors.

The Grays Road Recreation Center was the only neighborhood recreation center built by the Smith Family Trust specifically as a recreational building. All three of the other neighborhood centers utilized existing buildings modified to meet the recreational needs of the neighborhood's

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SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

children. At the Grays Road building the Trust was able to express its philosophies towards the nature and purpose of play and the proper socialization of children in a single building. The Trust incorporated modern recreational facilities, including a gymnasium, auditorium, and multi-purpose rooms, within a traditionally inspired exterior envelope, thus connecting its activities with the Quaker tradition of community responsibility and assuring that its presence in the neighborhood did not represent a jarring disruption of the community fabric.

The Grays Road Recreation Center is the last surviving example of the neighborhood playgrounds established in Philadelphia between 1918 and 1932 by the Smith Family Trust. As such, it constitutes an important example of the activities of the Trust, the first and largest charitable institution in Philadelphia established solely to serve the recreational and educational needs of children. The charitable activities of the Smith Family Trust and the implementation of those activities at neighborhood playgrounds like the Grays Road Recreation Center, are significant examples of the many efforts at social reform implemented throughout the United States during the Progressive Era.

Designed by prominent Philadelphia architect John T. Windrim, the Grays Road Recreation Center was the only Smith Family Trust neighborhood center designed specifically as a recreational facility. The Colonial Revival style building is an unusual example of Windrim's work, which tended towards Beaux Arts classicism.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Please see continuation sheets.

See continuation sheet

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 Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 0.2 acres

UTM References

A

1	8
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4	4	2	1	1	4	5
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Please see continuation sheets.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the Grays Road Recreation Center and the land it occupies.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth R. Mintz date November 1987
organization ELIZABETH R. MINTZ telephone (215) 592-0465
street & number 301 Cherry Street state Pennsylvania zip code 19106
city or town Philadelphia

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Grays Road Recreation Center, Philadelphia County
REFERENCES (continued)

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Grays Road Recreation Center, Philadelphia County
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (continued)

Beginning at a point at the northeast corner of the intersection of Christian Street and Stillman Street; thence north along the east side of Stillman Street approximately 146 feet to a point on the north side of Webster Street; thence at a right angle to the east approximately 60 feet to a point; thence at a right angle to the south approximately 146 feet to a point on the north side of Christian Street; thence west along the north side of Christian Street approximately sixty feet to the point of beginning.