

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

For HCRS 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 Norristown Historic District

and/or common West End

**2. Location**

street & number West Norristown, generally bounded by Stoney Creek on the not for publication  
east, Selma Street on the west, Elm Street on the north, and the railroad on the south.  
city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district \_\_\_\_\_

state Pennsylvania code \_\_\_\_\_ county Montgomery code \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input checked="" 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 Owners

street & number \_\_\_\_\_

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

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds

street & number One Montgomery Plaza

city, town Norristown state PA 19401

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title PA Historic Resource Survey Form has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date May 14, 1984  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Pennsylvania Bureau for Historic Preservation

city, town Harrisburg

# 7. Description

## Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

## Check one

unaltered  
 altered

## Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_ n/a

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

Located approximately 24 miles northwest of Philadelphia and 36 miles southeast of Reading, the proposed West End Historic District is a predominantly residential neighborhood of approximately 1700 structures, including individual row and duplex units. They stand on the hill in Norristown Borough that rises gradually from the west side of Stoney Creek and the north side of the Schuylkill River. Called the West End almost from the time of its initial development on the eve of the Civil War, this area developed on a grid plan that moved progressively up the hill, westward from Stoney Creek. The proposed District includes roughly 32 square blocks within the West End.

There are four exceptions to this comprehensive pattern. The first is the few rural relics, early agricultural and mill structures, that can be found in the District, engulfed by the late 19th century housing. The second exception is the four blocks of 19th century stores on West Marshall Street, between Corson and Kohn Streets, which serve as the West End's commercial district. Its buildings range from the 1876 market house to the c. 1930 West End Theatre. Light industrial buildings along the creek and river still stand as testimony to those streams' importance as early power sources. The former Quaker City (Tyson) Shirt Works at Corson and West Marshall Streets and the old Norristown Grain Binder Works at Corson and West Oak Streets are two of the most significant survivors. Also, from the West End's beginnings, West Main Street (originally called Egypt Road) cut through the District as the primary route between Norristown and the Perkiomen Valley. Large dwellings, both single residences and semi-detached houses, rose up along this thoroughfare at a more rapid pace than that of the surrounding speculative housing, which initially was concentrated to the north of Main Street. As the West End's formerly fashionable address, West Main Street remains the district's architectural show case.

The West End's grid forms rectangular blocks whose long sides run roughly north and south and are bisected lengthwise by alleys. Consequently, most of the houses face east and west. The three exceptions to this pattern are the stores and dwellings on West Marshall Street, the mansions along West Main Street, and the houses on West Lafayette Street, which parallels Main Street one block to the west.

While rowhouses predominate them, there is a large number of semi-detached houses in the District with an occasional free-standing house on some blocks. A few showing deep setbacks, steep gable roofs and unusual materials, such as slate and wood siding, pre-date the major developmental periods. Even on West Main Street there are many semi-detached houses, albeit large, often towered semi-detached houses. Single dwellings dominate only the two blocks between Haws Avenue and Noble Street. This overwhelming number of brick rows and twins gives the District a strong urban residential character.

Since the West End was developed in a deliberate, progressive pattern up the hill from the west side of Stoney Creek, the District serves as a unique living museum of Victorian architectural styles ranging between approximately 1885 and 1925. Also, in a museum-like fashion, the changing popularity of architectural styles unfolds both chronologically and topographically as one moves up the hill toward the Borough's limits. It is unique, not only because the dwellings are well-preserved, but also because they serve as small-town expressions of big-city high styles.

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The Norristown version of the Philadelphia rowhouse, with vaguely (Italianate and Greek Revival elements) stands near the creek on Corson and Astor Streets. Others, like the 600 and 700 blocks of Kohn Street, their flat brick facades rising flush with the sidewalk, present a Kafkaesque vision. On George Street, however, semi-detached, or twin, houses dominate. Some, in particular those between Marshall and Airy Streets, are set back from the sidewalk to form small terraces which combine with semi-hexagonal bays and large front porches to give the block a picturesque plasticity.

In the 1870's the Second Empire mode was found mostly on lower West Main Street, but by the end of that decade, the French style was being overshadowed by the local variant of the High Victorian Gothic, whose squat proportions and corbeled detailing on the upper floors compensated for the absence of polychromy and pointed arches. One group, in the 500 block of Stanbridge, is so "tough" as to be belligerent, and stands in contrast to the remarkable range of delicately rendered Gothic twins only a block away.

At the northern edges of the District, the early 20th century preference for classicism, in general, and the Georgian Revival, in particular, is apparent in the rows with their semi-hexagonal bays and the twins with their Georgian proportions and broken pediments above their cornices. The Arts and Crafts movement also left its mark on this end of town in the treatment of the stucco walls, arched entries, and dormers.

Main Street, however, remains the stage for the West End's most expressive architecture. There the local Victorian fascination for turrets and towers is self-evident. Styles range from a distinctive, if naive, Queen Anne to anemic Romanesque and beyond to some examples so eclectic as to defy easy categorization.

The West End is an outstanding example of a late-19th, early 20th century residential community. Its architectural integrity and variety are remarkable; intrusions are virtually non-existent. In fact, even many of its complementary structures, like mills and stores, are still intact.

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

**Specific dates** 1850-1920

**Builder/Architect** n/a

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Established in 1784, the original "Town of Norris" did not include the farmland west of Stoney Creek. It was not until 1852 that these farms were annexed to form what remains today as the bounds of the Borough of Norristown. Among the land absorbed by this expansion were the Chain, Williams, Harnell, Harus, and Knox farms of the West End. Speculative development in the West End began as early as 1854 when a syndicate of investors purchased a parcel near Buttonwood and Airy Streets from Thomas Knox for building lots (although no development in that area remains from that period).

The development of the West End was spurred by the physical enlargement of the Borough, industrial expansion and the construction in 1854 of the stone bridge across Stoney Creek at Main street, then known as Egypt Road. The bridge, which remains today, provided more direct access to central Norristown's Courthouse, stores and shops, institutions, and industries. By 1859 a local historian could write: "Main or Egypt Street beyond Stoney Creek contains a number of handsome residences and is neatly planted with tress." Another boon to the West End was the construction of the Stoney Creek Railroad in the early 1870's. A station was located just west of the Creek on Main and Markley Streets in the West End.

Initially, industry and housing were situated close to Stoney Creek and the Schuylkill River. (Responding to the demand for housing, speculative rowhousing development began among the first four blocks north of Marshall Street and was well underway by 1877, eventually creating what remains today as some of the more spectacular rowhouse streetscapes in suburban Philadelphia.) Early commercial development began along Marshall Street by 1871 and grew with the demand created by the adjacent residential growth. The early industries in the west End at that time included the Bolton Saw Mill and Lumber Yard (est. 1858) and a pottery on Pearl Street (est. c. 1870).

Development intensified in the 1870's. By the end of the decade, groups of three-story brick rowhouses were in place on the north/south streets of Astor, Chain, George and Kohn. West End industrial growth, such as the Norristown Grain Binder Works and the Quaker City Shirtworks located along Stoney Creek Railroad promoted more residential infill development in the 1880's as well as additional blocks of rowhouses north of Marshall street and along a portion of Noble street. The 800 and 900 blocks of West Lafayette and West Washington streets was rapidly developed during the next decade, and by 1909 most of the remaining "gaps" were closed. While Marshall Street became the "Main Street," Main Street became the fashionable address, and supported most of the West End mansions. Among these are the Shannon House (1870), the Lowe House (1860/75) and the Romanesque Wentz House (1895). As the Borough approached its Centennial in 1912, the area proposed as the West End Historic District essentially was in place.

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From its beginnings, the West End was a distinguishable and, in many respects, independent area of Norristown. Not only did Stoney Creek and the railroad serve to isolate it from Central Norristown, but it also developed its own industries, commercial "Main Street," and institutions. In addition to those structures already noted, by 1912 major West End industries included the Wilcomb Machine Co., the Lee Harris Mfg. Co., and the Ballard Knitting Co. on West Washington Street; the Wildman and Fowler and Wolfe manufacturing companies and W. K. Gresh and Sons Cigar Mfg. along Stoney Creek; the Rhoad/Morgan grain and feed mills, store, and grain elevators at Elm and Astor Streets; and the Modern Laundry at Noble and Washington Streets. These facilities all remain intact. Marshall, rather than Main Street grew into the West End's primary commercial district. (The large Western Market Hall was constructed in 1876, and by 1878 the Yeakle Hotel was in operation, as were a number of small shops.) Also contributing to the growth and independence of the West End was the establishment of local institutions, such as schools, churches and fire companies. The first public school was erected in 1870 at Chain and Airy Streets. It was two-stories and could accommodate 50 pupils. In 1894 it was replaced by the John F. Hartranft school which could serve 360 pupils. A school was built on Noble Street in 1888 for 380 pupils. A Methodist Church was built on Haws Avenue in 1875. It was followed by the Grace Lutheran (1885), Calvary Baptist (1887), All Saints (1889) and Christ Reformed (1896) Churches. No doubt indicative of the West End's growing importance was the Central Presbyterian Church's decision to relocate to the West End from central Norristown in 1902. Within a few years, three more churches were established: Schwenkfelder (1904), Seventh Day Adventists (1902) and St. Francis of Assissi (1904).

Another factor contributing to the West End's growth was the opening of trolley lines along Main, Chain, Marshall and Stanbridge Streets in 1887. Central Norristown had been serviced since 1884. These first lines, "horsecar" routes, were electrified in 1893. Electric rail service to Philadelphia and other suburban areas was vastly improved with the opening of the Philadelphia and Western Railroad High Speed Line to downtown Norristown in 1912. Although the terminus of the P & W High Speed Line was located in central Norristown, it put the West End (as well as the rest of the Borough) within commuting distance of Philadelphia and other suburban communities.

The West End's independence was reinforced by Norristown's borough form of government and 'ward' system of electing officials. Proudly proclaiming itself the "largest independent borough in the world," the citizens of Norristown have steadily resisted attempts to reorganize as a city, for which its population qualifies. Movements to adopt a city charter were initiated in 1881, 1888, 1913, 1957, 1960 and 1970 and defeated every time. The citizens clung to their old ward (there have been 12 since 1925) loyalties.

If the West End's historical significance must be determined through documentary research, its architectural significance is readily apparent. As noted in the architectural description, it is an outstanding example of a late Victorian residential community, cohesive yet marvelously varied. It is a textbook example of late 19th, early 20th century rowhouse and duplex design. Its streetscapes are virtually unbroken by intrusions. No highway or urban renewal program has cut a swath in its overall unity. Individually and in groups, the West End's buildings

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exhibit integrity of setting and design. Street by street, the architecture of the west End presents a clear picture of how this area grew and developed.

The proposed boundaries of the West End Historic District are based on three factors: natural features, historical development, and architectural integrity. Stoney Creek, which runs in a northerly direction from the Schuylkill River on the south, forms the boundry on the District's east side. It was, in fact, construction of a bridge over this Creek in 1854 that initiated the development of the West End in the second half of the 19th century. Reinforcing the selection of this boundary is the Stoney Creek railroad which parallels the creek. Both clearly separate the West End from central Norristown. The Schuylkill River on the south, also paralled by a railroad (the Schuylkill Division of the former Pennsylvania Railroad) forms the southern boundary for the District. The boundary line, however, was drawn slightly north of the tracks where there are unified and cohesive groupings of 19th century residential and industrial buildings.

The western, northern and a small portion of the southern boundary are based on the West End's historical development. Since the West End exhibits an amazing degree of development continuity, the boundaries were drawn in these areas to capture this continuity within a historical context. Using the Sanborn Insurance Maps of 1909 and 1920 as a rough guide, the lines were drawn to include most of the contiguous development of buildings in place by that decade. By 1909 there was extensive residential development between Hamilton and Selma Streets above Main and below Marshall Streets. this, combined with the exceptional architectural integrity of the existing house, argues for extending the western boundary to several blocks along Selma Street. The northern boundary lines is somewhat stepped, rising from Marshall street to portions of Oak and Elm and encompassing nearly all the buildings erected by 1909. Where appropriate, the line follows back alleys, permitting the inclusion of significant units of rowhouses which face the main streets.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 220

Quadrangle name Norristown, PA

Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>9</u> <u>4</u> <u>9</u> <u>5</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>7</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>5</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>4</u>
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D	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u> <u>6</u> <u>2</u> <u>9</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>2</u> <u>4</u>
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E	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u> <u>1</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>3</u>
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F	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>9</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>9</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>6</u> <u>0</u> <u>8</u>
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G	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>9</u> <u>2</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u>
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H	<u>  </u>	<u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u>	<u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u>
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Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

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

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ray Ott, Martha Wolf, Richard Webster

organization Cee Jay Frederick Associates date June 1984

street & number 29 South Walnut Street telephone 215-431-7899

city or town West Chester state Pennsylvania 19380

# 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

For HCRS 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

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 220

Quadrangle name Norristown, PA

Quadrangle scale 1=24,000

UMT References

A 

1	1	8	4	6	9	4	9	0	4	4	4	1	5	0	0
Zone			Easting			Northing									

C 

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

E 

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

G 

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

B 

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

D 

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

F 

1	1	8	4	6	9	3	1	0	4	4	4	0	6	1	0
Zone			Easting			Northing									

H 

Zone			Easting			Northing									

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

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state	N/A	code	county	code

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State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer  
title

date 9/23/84

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration

date



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Beginning at a point at the easternmost corner of W. Main and Selma Streets; northeast along the east side of Selma Street to the southernmost corner of Selma and W. Marshall Streets; thence southeast to the southernmost corner of Buttonwood and W. Marshall Streets; thence northeast to the southernmost corner of Buttonwood Street and Blackberry Alley; thence southeast to a point formed by the extension of the east side of Hurst Alley South; thence northeast along this aforementioned line to a point at the southernmost corner of Hurst Alley and W. Oak Street; thence southeast along the south side of W. Oak Street to the southernmost corner of W. Oak and Stanbridge Streets; thence north along a line formed by the east side of Stanbridge Street 250 feet to a point formed by the intersection of the north boundary of a lot designated as 718 Stanbridge Street; thence southeast along this aforementioned boundary and continuing to a point on the east side of Roosevelt Avenue; thence north along the east side of Roosevelt Avenue to a point at the southeast corner of Roosevelt Avenue and W. Elm Street; thence, after a very short jog east, this aforementioned line continues along the west boundary of a lot defined as 819 W. Elm Street, to a point at the northernmost corner of this lot; thence southeast along the back lot lines of lots known as 819 to 801 W. Elm Street and continuing to a point on the southeast side of Haws Avenue; thence northeast a short distance to the southernmost corner of Haws Avenue and Hope Alley; thence southeast along the south side of Hope Alley and continuing along this line to a point formed by the rear lot line of lots designated 800 to 806 Fairbanks Avenue; thence southeast along these aforementioned rear lot lines to a point formed by the extension of the rear lot lines of lots designated as 709 to 701 W. Elm Street west; thence southeast along the aforementioned rear lot lines, and continuing along an extension of this line to a point formed by the rear lot lines of lots designated as 809 to 831 George Street; thence northeast along the aforementioned lot lines and continuing along an irregular path formed by rear and side yard lot lines of lots designated as 831 to 851 George Street to a point formed by the southwest side of W. Beech Street; thence southeast along the west side of W. Beech Street to a point formed by the western boundary of a right of way for the Stoney Creek Branch of former Reading Railroad; thence south along aforementioned western boundary 3900 feet along a curved path turning westerly to a point formed by the south side of W. Airy Street; thence northwest along W. Airy Street to the westernmost corner of W. Airy Street and Astor Street; thence southwest along the north side of Astor Street and continuing on a line to a point formed by the southwest side of W. Main Street; thence southeast along the west side of W. Main Street to a point defined by the intersection of the northwest boundary of a lot defined as 344 W. Main Street and the aforementioned W. Main Street; thence southwest along the aforementioned lot line and continuing concurrent with a high wall along an irregular curved path 640 feet to a point at the southernmost corner of a lot defined as 101 Pearl Street; thence northwest along the southwest boundary of the aforementioned lot at 101 Pearl Street and continuing on a line to a point defined by the north side of Chain Street; thence northwest on a line defined by the extension of the east side of W. Washington Street south 1470 feet to a point along a slightly curved path following the northeast side of W. Washington Street to a point defined by the northwest side of Stanbridge Street; thence southwest along the northwest side of Stanbridge Street to a point defined by the southernmost corner of a lot defined as 902 Jackson Street; thence northwest to a point defined by the southeast side of Noble Street; thence northeast along the southeast side of Noble Street to a point at

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

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

Norristown West End Historic District

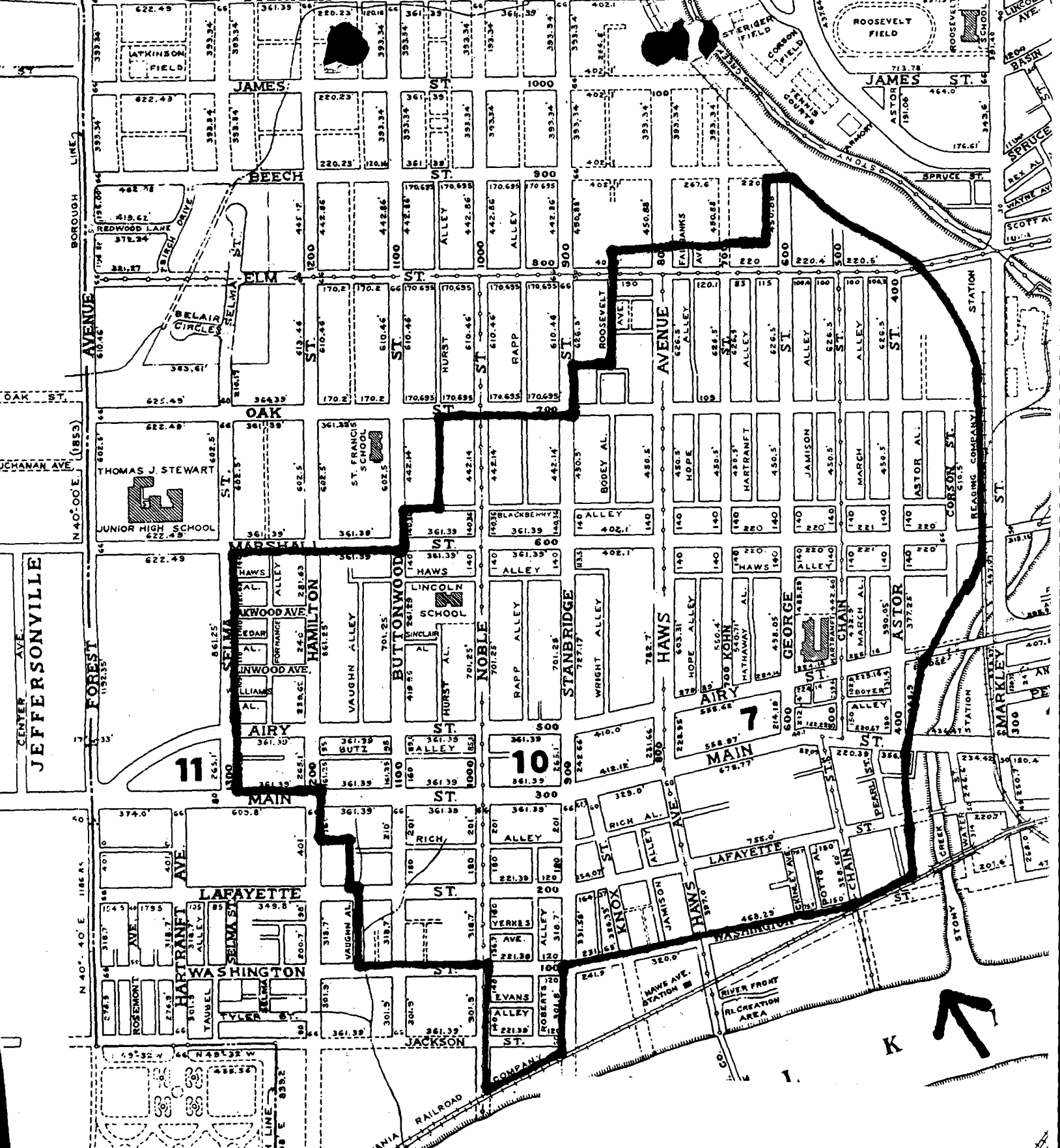
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Continuation sheet

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the southeast corner of Noble and W. Washington Streets; thence northwest along the northeast side of W. Washington Street 580 feet to a point defined by the intersection of the back lot line of properties defined as 203 to 245 Buttonwood Street; thence northeast along the aforementioned back lot line and continuing to a point on the northeast side of W. Lafayette Street; thence northwest 80 feet to a point defined by the northwest boundary of a lot defined as 1117 W. Lafayette Street; thence northeast along the aforementioned property line and continuing 230 feet to a point at the northeasternmost edge of Rich Alley; thence northwest along the northeast side of Rich Alley to a point on the southeast side of Hamilton Street; thence northeast to a point on the northeast side of W. Main Street; thence northwest along the northeast side of W. Main Street to a point; the place of beginning.



WEST NORRISTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT  
 Borough of Norristown  
 Montgomery County, Pennsylvania