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(UNIONVILLE)

**DOWNTOWN WEST CHESTER
HISTORIC DISTRICT**

West Chester Borough
Chester County, Pennsylvania

Quad: West Chester, Pennsylvania
1954; revised 1973

Zone 18	
A	E448120 N4423700
B	E448590 N4423420
C	E448430 N4422920
D	E448130 N4423080
E	E448020 N4423280
F	E447080 N4423620

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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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 Chester Downtown Historic District

and or common

2. Location

street & number Properties fronting Gay and Market Streets from Matlack— not for publication
to New Streets, and High and Church Streets from Biddle to Barnard Streets.
city, town West Chester — vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 042 county Chester code 029

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 checked="" 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership (See attached Survey Forms.)

street & number n/a

city, town — vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Chester County Courthouse

street & number High Street

city, town West Chester state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title West Chester Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1981 federal state county local

depository for survey records Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

city, town Harrisburg state Pennsylvania

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

The proposed West Chester Downtown Historic District includes approximately 15 sq. blocks of the Borough's downtown. Central to this area are five blocks along the Borough's two parallel "Main Streets," Gay and Market. This area includes the original town plat (the four blocks bordering Gay and High Streets) and subsequent commercial expansion to the east and west along Gay and Market Streets. In addition, the District extends two blocks north and south along Church and High Streets to include early 20th Century commercial, institutional and office expansion into former prominent residential areas; and the "Industrial Square" south of Barnard Street between Church and High. Here Denney-Reyburn has manufactured tags and labels since 1888 in a large factory complex built around the early Barnard Street School (c.1840). It resides quite comfortably within a neighborhood of early Victorian townhouses and rowbuildings. High Street is the major north-south route (Route 100) through town.

Overall, the proposed District includes approximately 400 structures (including individual rowbuildings and duplexes) of which roughly 150 are in residential use, 100 in commercial retail/service use, 75 in office and professional use and 75 in mixed residential, office or commercial use. About 15 structures serve as churches and governmental administration offices (including the Courthouse) and one is in industrial and office use (Denney-Reyburn at Church and Barnard Streets). Fifty (50) structures within the District were previously documented on PHMC Historic Resource Survey Forms (West Chester Historic Sites Survey, 1980) and seven buildings are listed on the National Register. These include the Warner Theater (1930), the National Bank of West Chester (1836), the Courthouse (1846), the Smith-Sharpless House (1789), the Lincoln Building (c. 1834), the Buckwalter Building (1901) and the F&M Building (1907). Also, seven of these structures are listed in the Borough's local "Historical Register" and are under the purview of the borough's home-spun Historic Review Board. (National Bank of West Chester, the Courthouse, Horticultural Hall, the Smith-Sharpless House, the Lincoln Building, the Warner Theatre, and the Hogue Grocery Store.) Eleven structures are regarded as non-contributing, including three downtown banks in "Georgian" and/or "Federal" recreations. Also intruding into the District are three municipal and three private parking lots. Among these lots, only one private lot at the NW corner of Market and Walnut Streets presents a significant intrusion into the core of the District.

The three-story three-bay brick row building conservatively embellished with Greek Revival and later Italianate detailing is by far the most common building form along Gay and Market Streets. A number of earlier, dormered 2 1/2 story Federal rowbuildings can be found, however, along virtually every block of Gay Street, which was the first to be commercially developed. Market Street architecture is exclusively a product of the later half of the 19th century. Along both streets an occasional rowbuilding has been updated with a Queen Anne bay or corner turret, a mansard roof or, in the extreme (and fortunately rare) case, with a masonry, aluminum or steel curtain over the second and third story facades. On the lighter side, and in the spirit of "Main Street" frivolity, a music store on the 100 block of East Gay Street has joined two rowbuildings with a pent roof in the form of a piano keyboard.

The large scale and detached buildings stand out within this contiguous streetscape and have become landmarks for Borough residents. Foremost is the iron columned Greek Revival Courthouse in the district core. Others include the Colonial Revival Post Office at Gay and Walnut Streets, the five-story Art Deco Green Tree Building (1933) at the NE corner of Gay and High Streets, the Beaux Arts Farmers & Mechanics (F&M) Building (1907) at High and Market Streets, and, at the District's west end, the St. Agnes Church on West Gay Street, a large Gothic structure erected in stone during the 1840's. (see continuation sheet)

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The row-form building patterns are duplicated along the first north and south blocks of both High and Church Streets and along the west side of the 100 block of South High Street. Further north are large brick Federal and Greek Revival office and residential twins on both sides of N. High's 300 block and three large institutional structures: the Biddle Street School on N. Church Street (Colonial Revival, 1917), the Major Groff Memorial Armory at High and Washington Streets (Georgian Revival), and the Horticultural Hall (Romanesque Revival), another Thomas U. Walter designed structure built of Serpentine stone and brick in 1848. The 100 block of S. Church Street is another of the few blocks within the District not dominated with rowbuildings. Instead there are large twin and detached buildings dating from the 1820's through the 1870's built in Federal, Greek Revival and Federal Revival styles that have served both as fashionable office and residential addresses since the late 19th century. The District's lone industrial building is found at it's southern boundary where the Denny-Rayburn factory still operates (the same site since 1880) within a facility that attractively encompasses the former Barnard Street School (c.1840).

The proposed boundaries represent an attempt to include the Borough's historic (and contiguous) commercial downtown (to 1930's) while not encroaching into residential neighborhoods. As discussed earlier, they include all properties fronting the five main blocks of Gay and Market Streets from New Street on the west to Matlack Street on the east. The southern and northern extensions capture late 19th and early 20th century office expansion, the "Industrial Square" along South Church Street, more commercial retail and service expansion along South High Street, and office/institutional expansion along N. High and N. Church Streets.

Extending east, continuity abruptly ends at Matlack Street along East Gay and Franklin Street along East Market Street and becomes "highway commercial." Strong residential neighborhoods abut the proposed District to the southwest along Wollerton Alley (south of Market Street) and Woodbine Alley (west of South Church Street). Strong residential neighborhoods are also adjacent to the proposed southeast District boundary along Cedar Alley (south of East Market Street) and Sharon Alley (east of South High Street). Demolitions and intrusions just west of Darlington Street mark the west boundary along Market Street and at New Street along Gay. A residential neighborhood of rowhouses along both Hannum Avenue and West Chestnut Street establish the boundary to the northwest.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400-1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500-1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	___ exploration settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	___ communications	___ industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics government	___ transportation
		___ invention		___ other (specify)

Specific dates _____ Builder/Architect _____

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
 The heart of both the Borough and the proposed Historic District are the downtown blocks bordering the intersection of Gay and High Streets that formed the original town plan of 1784. Established at the site of a crossroads tavern known as "Turks Head," this new town was the chosen site for a courthouse and prison to serve a scaled-down Chester County. The new Delaware County was carved out of the southeast corner of Chester County, which included the former county seat at the City of Chester. The District provides material documentation of the initial residential and later commercial and institutional redevelopment of these blocks; and subsequent expansion, first to the east and west and then to the north and south, that today comprises West Chester's Downtown and Central Business District.

The four original blocks are anchored by the Chester County Courthouse (1849), which faces two outstanding buildings across High Street: the National Bank of Chester County (1836) and the First National Bank of West Chester (1912). Between these Greek Revival and Neo-Classical bank buildings is one of the surviving structures which relates to the initial development of the Courthouse site: the 1789 Smith-Sharpless House. This Federal style structure is among five other structures within the proposed district that remain from this first period of development. Both the Courthouse and the National Bank of Chester County (now Fidelity Bank) were designed by Thomas U. Walter. Adjacent to the Courthouse on the north is another survivor from West Chester's early period, a 1793 stone, Federal style residence which became the Aiken's Drug Store in 1866. Since brick faced, this building stands intact with two Victorian storefronts inserted in the first floor. Since these blocks have historically been the town's focal point, they also contain most of its large-scale structures. Later, but on the same scale in this area are the Beaux Arts F & M Building (1907) and the Art Deco Warner Theater (1930) and Green Tree Apartment (1933) buildings. Woolworth's (1928) also remains at Gay and High as a strong "anchor" in the downtown, retaining its original facade and signage.

Located on the divide between the Brandywine and Chester Creek Watersheds and away from major transportation routes, the Borough lacked power for industrial development and access as a significant market place. Nineteenth century development, therefore, continued to focus on the Courthouse and public administrative functions in the downtown. As core blocks reached capacity, development began to expand east and west along Gay and, later, Market Streets. The early expansion is reflected today in the many remaining 2 1/2 story Georgian and Federal Vernacular rowbuildings along Gay Street. The Caleb Taylor Store (c. 1818) at 100 East Gay Street, the Federal Ehne's Bakery (c. 1816) at 136 East Gay, Kofke's Store (c. 1816) at 141 West Gay and the Victorian/Federal Penn's Table (1794) at Church and Gay are among the more notable buildings from this period of expansion. Victorian era infill and redevelopment complete most of the pedestrian scale row forms along the town's two "Main Streets."

By 1829 (pop. 553) growth had picked up and the Borough's population continued to double almost every decade until 1860 (pop. 4,757) with later expansion occurring north and south along Church and High Streets. This is well documented in Classical and Greek Revival rowbuildings along South High Street and late Federal and Greek Revival row, duplex and detached buildings along South Church Street. (see continuation sheet)

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The Lewis-Sharpless Federal houses (1839) at 100/102 South Church and the Greek Revival Hoopes-Hibbard Houses (c. 1844) at 117/119 South Church offer examples of this expansion along Church, while the Parke-Dillingham Houses and the twin at 103-105 South High Street (1847) reflect similar expansion in Greek Revival twins along South High. Similar to the streetscape patterns along Gay and Market Streets, Victorian era infill and redevelopment complete the building continuity along South Church and High Streets with Italianate, Queen Anne and Federal Revival styles.

Church Street, north of Chestnut, reflects later 19th and early 20th century institutional expansion. The 1889 Friends School at 218 North Church marks initial institutional expansion with this small vaguely Queen Anne private school facility, while the later Utilitarian Neo-Colonial Biddle Street School (1917) firmly establishes the north-west corner of the District at Church and Biddle Streets. Horticulture Hall (Thomas U. Walter, 1848) and the Neo-Colonial Groff Armory Building at High and Washington Streets are institutional anchors on North High Streets 100 block, while the 200 block consists of mid to late 19th century Greek Revival and twin brick houses that, for the most part, serve as professional offices along this main north-south route through the Borough.

The four core blocks and all five blocks along Gay Street have experienced the most redevelopment over the years. Notable large scale replacements were the Courthouse in 1849 and the Green Tree Hotel (with the Green Tree Building in 1933). Most of this redevelopment, however, is exhibited in the Gay Street rowbuildings where one finds early 2 1/2-story Federal buildings adjacent to later 3-story Greek Revival, Italianate and Queen Anne rows, a result of numerous demolitions and rebuilding. Elsewhere in the District this juxtaposition is not so apparent. Market Street (originally named South Street) is generally a product of the mid-to-late 19th and early 20th century. Market Street's function as a "Main Street" began in the mid-19th century when the blocks between New and Church Streets were planned as a wider avenue to accommodate an outside market of booths that were set up in the center of Market Street. (This practice was discontinued when a Market House was constructed between New and Darlington in the 1870's; it has since been demolished and the site is out of the District.)

West Chester is not atypical of other suburban Philadelphia County Seats. Like Doylestown (Bucks County) and Media (Delaware County), West Chester never became an industrial town. It began as and remained the governmental, legal, cultural and commercial focal point for the County. Only the Borough's commercial role has significantly diminished over the years as, similar to many other downtowns, post-World War II consumers turned to the downtown's suburban counterpart, the mall. Significantly, however, West Chester's built artifacts from those prosperous commercial days remain and pioneering efforts to re-establish the downtown's commercial role within the automobile society have begun. Since so much of West Chester's downtown remains intact, there is still time for these current commercial ventures to use the "old plant" and thus preserve a living example of this important component of the town's history.

West Chester's other functions remain vital and its County government and legal service functions have been expanded considerably following the recent rapid development of Chester County. Much of this expansion has been into former commercial facilities and will likely continue to do so. To date, this movement, together with both new and old

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commercial activities, have been kind to the downtown's built environment. Gay Street exhibits excellent building continuity. There is only one parking lot "hole" along the entire five-block area within the District and only three non-contributing buildings. Market Street is marred with one large parking lot at Walnut Street on the NW corner, and two small "holes" along the west 100 block, which are also used for parking. Of the 64 structures along Market Street, five have been classified as non-contributing. Together these unique dual "Main Streets" amount to almost 10 full blocks of a virtually unbroken downtown commercial streetscape that documents architectural styles ranging from the Federal to the Art Deco.

To the south the district documents similar, but later (1860-1900), commercial rowbuilding/storefront expansion along South High Street and the first block of South Church Street. Along the 100 block of South Church and the 300 block of North High, the District includes initial residential development in the Federal, Greek Revival and Italianate styles with large twins and detached buildings that have, for the most part, been adapted for downtown office and public service uses since just before the turn-of-the-century. The public institutions in these areas (such as the Biddle Street School, the Armory, Horticulture Hall, and the Barnard Street School) also serve as important reminders of Downtown West Chester's many functions in service to both Borough and County residents.

The District's most distinguished 19th Century architect was Thomas U. Walter, who established a lasting Greek Revival trend throughout the Borough. His Downtown work includes the Borough's Greek Revival landmarks: the Courthouse (1846) and the National Bank of West Chester (1836). However, his work also includes buildings in other Classical styles, such as Horticultural Hall (1848) built in the Romanesque Revival style and the Federal style Thomas Bell House (1829) at 101 S. Church Street, which is perhaps one of his earliest works in the Borough. Although other 19th Century buildings in the downtown may not be associated with renowned architects, there are numerous examples of high architectural style. The Church Street Market House (1870), a large two story brick structure, and the First West Chester Fire Company building (1889) --also on Church Street-- are fine example of the Romanesque Revival style. Well preserved examples of Federal style architecture are found on the 200 block of W. Gay Street in the stone Shield's Mansion (c.1820s) and the Hickman-Hemphill House, the latter being a mid-century reconstruction and an example of this early style's tenacity in a conservative suburban Philadelphia County. Twentieth Century buildings of architectural merit include the F&M Building (1907) at High and Market Streets and the Chester County Trust Company Building (1905) at 17 E. Gay Street, both constructed in the Beaux Arts style. The six story F&M Building is also of note as the Borough's only "skyscraper". The Art Deco style was first seen in West Chester with the opening of the Warner Theatre in 1930. This is one of only three theatres in Pennsylvania based on the designs of the famous Chicago firm of Rapp & Rapp which specialized in opulent movie houses (it is the only one in eastern Pennsylvania).

(continued, sheet 3)

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Overall, the mere survival of many intact buildings within a relatively contiguous setting represents this "Commercial" District's principal significance. Generally, buildings serving as professional offices along Church and High Streets retain the most integrity. Since commercial/storefront properties typically undergo more ownership transfers, use changes and market place adaptations, survival of architecturally original or pure structures is an rare occurrence. Following this pattern, West Chester's building stock has undergone numerous recyclings and, at times, rough treatment, over the years. Surviving today, however, is a downtown with its streetscapes intact and strongly anchored with many recognized architecturally and historically significant survivors. The West Chester Downtown Historic District gives equivalent recognition to the smaller and less obvious row-form and vernacular survivors that contribute to the Downtown District's sense of "time and place."

9. Major Bibliographical References

Daily Local News, "West Chester Past and Present, Centennial Souvenir," 1899.

Schooler, Alice K., West Chester Historic Sites Survey, 1981.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 51.6 acres

Quadrangle name West Chester, Pennsylvania

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	4	4	8	1	2	10	4	4	2	3	7	0	10
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

1	8	4	4	8	5	9	10	4	4	2	3	4	2	10
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

1	8	4	4	8	4	3	10	4	4	2	2	9	2	10
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D

1	8	4	4	8	1	3	10	4	4	2	3	0	8	10
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E

1	8	4	4	8	0	2	10	4	4	2	3	2	8	10
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F

1	8	4	4	7	0	8	10	4	4	2	3	6	2	10
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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

(See attached 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 H. Ott, Jr., Principal

organization Cee Jay Frederick Associates

date October 29, 1984

street & number 29 South Walnut Street

telephone 215-431-7899

city or town West Chester,

state Pennsylvania 19382

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