

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Girard Avenue Historic District

and or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 1415 - 2028 Girard Avenue; 1700 block of Thompson Street N/A not for publication

city, town Philadelphia N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Philadelphia code 101

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name See Attached. Multiple

street & number

city, town N/A vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Philadelphia City Hall, Department of Records

street & number Broad and Market Streets

city, town Philadelphia Pennsylvania state

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title North Philadelphia Survey I has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1984  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Bureau for Historic Preservation

city, town Harrisburg Pennsylvania state

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" 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

The Girard Avenue Historic District includes the buildings of Girard Avenue between the two focal points of its development -- Broad Street, the grand avenue of the Nouveau Riche on the east, and Girard College, the principal landmark of the region, on the west (individually listed on the National Register). Great houses, major churches and institutions occupy each end of the district, while the center has the added interest of commerce that marks the point where Ridge Avenue crosses Girard. Two impressive banks and a half block away, the Ridge Avenue Farmers Market (on the National Register) as well as smaller commercial buildings enliven the intersection. Together they represent the emerging nature of the upper middle class urban neighborhood, centered on social institutions, and providing an opportunity for conspicuous display of the ability to consume.

For nearly a century, the district was announced by Willis Hale's great mansion for Peter Widener at the corner of Broad and Girard (demolished circa 1978) which indicated the ambitions of the region's residents. Chronologically, the district began further to the west in the vicinity of 17th Street where several of the institutions of Francisville, a pre-existing community of stoneworkers and bricklayers, were erected in the 1840s, beginning with the handsome stone gothic church of St. Matthew's Episcopal, and shortly followed by a Quaker meeting house, and then the brownstone gothic "Greenhill" Presbyterian Church, designed by John Notman in 1847. Its name suggests the rural qualities of the region -- qualities which induced Stephen Girard to provide that his college for orphans be erected on his farm at Corinthian Avenue and what is now Girard Avenue, and not in Center City as originally proposed. In the 1840s and 1860s, rows of houses were erected along Girard Avenue, including the Greek Revival, ruled stucco front houses on the north side of the 2000 block, followed by the Italianate detailed brick rows of the 1700 block. With the earlier churches, these gave an upscale appearance of prosperity that made it attractive for development in the generation after the Civil War and culminated with the great mansions and townhouses on the 1400 and 2000 blocks.

The horse car lines along the diagonal of Ridge Avenue brought commercial development, with the mammoth High Victorian Ridge Avenue Farmers Market by community resident Davis Supplee, the first major landmark (individually listed on the National Register). In 1886 the corner property at Girard and Ridge was acquired for the Northwestern National Bank. Its facade on the angled front and its color scheme are derived from Frank Furness' Centennial National Bank but its detail shows the influence of German design that its architect, Otto Wolf usually used for breweries for the German community. Across the street is the handsome beaux-arts, limestone Girard Avenue Trust, designed by Wilson, Harris and Richards, the successors to the Wilson Brothers. It marks the dramatic changes of American architectural styles from the polychromed Victorian designs of the 1870s to the monochromatic classicism of the turn of the century.

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To the east at 17th Street is a significant cluster of institutions that emphasizes the nature of a community rooted in the German and Scotch-Irish ethnic groups who remained divorced from the Quaker, Episcopal, English circles then settling near Rittenhouse Square. The principal institutions were built by the Catholic Church including the extraordinary Roman Baroque Church of the Gesu on the 1700 block of Stiles and the utilitarian colonial revival buildings of St. Joseph's College, which are now used by St. Joseph's Prep, and the Jesuit order. The Church of the Gesu (1879ff) is most impressive. E.F. Durang was the architect, providing a monumental columned facade with a voluted upper level that intentionally recalled Vignola's Roman proto-Baroque Church of the Gesu. And like Vignola's masterpiece, Durang devised a spectacular barrel vaulted nave with crypto-collateral aisles, that forms one of the great spaces of Philadelphia.

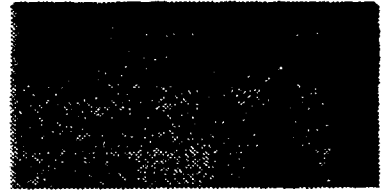
To the east and west are groups of residences that describe the range of the Girard Avenue community, from the relatively small mid-nineteenth century late-Federal and Greek Revival houses near Girard College to the Victorian unified block at Carlisle for William Weightman, and the immense post-Civil War brownstone doubles on the south side of the 2000 block. These are interspersed with several individual houses of great architectural interest. Most of these are primarily toward the east end, in the vicinity of the great mansions located along Broad Street, and include an impressive Victorian brownstone at 1421, and the wonderful French Gothic house for Ferdinand Keller (circa 1895) by William Price at 1609 Girard. Its limestone-trimmed French Gothic facade shows the influences of late nineteenth century historicism.

Equally interesting are the speculative row blocks that begin with the individualized Italianate rows of the 1700 and 1800 blocks which recall the west Rittenhouse houses. By 1880 however, developers such as William Weightman had introduced conspicuous consumption in the middle class row. Two important groups are included in the Girard Avenue District--a monumental red brick Victorian group on the 1400 block (attributed to Willis Hale) and the documented Hale group at 1816-1834 Girard. The former buildings are arranged as doubles on either side of a central five-unit block. Dark brick accented with contrasting marble bases, lintels and sills, and unified horizontally by bands of glazed brick link these to the Victorian taste of the 1870s. Pressed-metal bays imitating cut stone, add a vertical accent and unified cadence while the form of larger buildings at the center, and lower mansarded doubles on each side repeats a type of monumental composition that Weightman had tried in Rittenhouse in the 1870s. The row on the 1800 block is more conventional in that it continues with no breaks--but adds a syncopated rhythm of its own alternating Hindu and round arches in pairs of houses. Brownstone trim and dark red brick show Hale responding to the lessened stridency of Queen Anne polychromy but with his typical individuality.

Taken together the buildings of the Girard Avenue district describe a half century of building in Philadelphia by architects associated with middle class developments. Here those designers had the opportunity to work in the larger scale of the nouveau riche -- and took full advantage of the fact. The result is one of Philadelphia's most visually impressive collection of late-nineteenth century houses and institutions. Despite changes in the appearance of several of its institutions, the district remains cohesive, clearly differentiated by scale, and by architect design from the small rowhouses to the north and south.

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At the present, the district is undergoing the first stages of rehabilitation and renovation, with perhaps 10 percent of the buildings showing signs of renovation. Most are essentially intact, though as noted, apartment conversions are typical as are some alterations to make shopfronts towards Ridge Avenue. The district maintains a high degree of integrity with 97 percent contributing (102) or significant (35), while only four buildings are intrusions.

## 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/ 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 checked="" 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 1840 - 1930

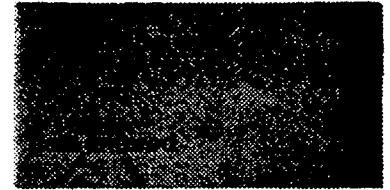
Builder Architect

J. Notman, E.F. Durang, Willis Hale, etc.

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

In the 1920s when Theodore Dreiser selected an appropriate setting for the 1870s home of the anti-hero of The Financier, Frank Cowperwood, he chose west Girard Avenue. That choice was appropriate, for west of Broad Street, Girard Avenue was one of the principal centers of the nouveau riche, rivalling North Broad Street, and connected to that axis by the great mansions (now demolished) of the Widener and Elkins families. Though initially an English-Scotch village (denoted by a Quaker meeting house and the Presbyterian church) at its height in the 1870s and 1880s, the community included important professionals, industrialists and financiers primarily drawn from German ethnic stock. It was that group that commissioned the principal monuments of the region and as could be expected in an increasingly class conscious city, by architects typically associated with the German community, among them, E.F. Durang, Willis Hale, Otto Wolf, and Charles Autenreith. Here their designs show traits derived from nineteenth century German brick architecture, which are particularly apparent in the flamboyant brickwork which outlines windows and doors and cornices without the strident polychromy of the anglophile Ruskinian Gothic. The resulting buildings include monumental townhouse blocks, major churches, and institutions, and several important commercial buildings. Together they are unified by scale, period and patronage and provide an impressive picture of the third center of the middle class German mercantile community, after it had removed to the west from the Northern Liberties.

Girard Avenue became an important nouveau riche center because of an historical event -- the construction of Girard College in the 1840s, and because of a planning event -- the laying out of Girard Avenue to be half again the normal street width. Such changes in the otherwise regular grid of Philadelphia typically are marked by larger houses as was the case on Broad Street and Spring Garden Street. In this instance that larger scale would shortly facilitate a trolley line down the middle of the street which connected to the Ridge Avenue and the Broad Street lines. With the construction of the Girard Avenue Bridge in 1875-6, this street, like Spring Garden Street which also had a bridge across the Schuylkill, gained significance as a transportation corridor which in the pre-automobile age was viewed as an advantage rather than a liability. It is certainly not a coincidence that the first houses at the west end of the district are relatively small, relating only to the street, while the houses in the center of the district are larger, representing the construction of the trolley line, and finally the largest houses post-date the opening of the bridge which made the district highly visible and hence appropriate to the principal purpose of constructing a mansion, namely conspicuous display. Though not as grand as North Broad Street, or the mid blocks of Spring Garden, Girard Avenue was impressive both where it connected to Broad Street and towards Girard Avenue.

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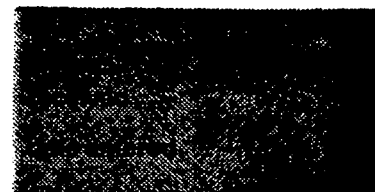
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Though Girard Avenue was first settled in 1840s, by the English stock populations who built the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches, and some of the plain brick rowhouses, its most impressive buildings date from after the Centennial decade, and are primarily for German clients, and as noted earlier, by German architects. The German heritage of the region began with several institutions including St. Joseph's College, and the demolished German Hospital (Corinthian and Girard, now in Merion and renamed Lankenau Hospital); they were shortly followed by German residents. Among these were German brewers Christian Schmidt (on the 2000 block) a Betz (on the 1400 block) and Frederick Poth (on the 2000 block), architect Charles Autenreith (1716 Girard), Photographer William Rau, and an impressive assortment of medical doctors and dentists, lawyers and bankers. The clumping together of ethnic groups by choice in residential neighborhoods, first appeared in the 1840s in the wealthier classes, who could choose to separate work from residence. This became one of the principal changes of the late-nineteenth century city, first developing in the 1840s in Rittenhouse for elite groups. Its appearance here for an ethnic group -- the Germans -- occurs at an early date and marks the growing social cohesion of the Germans. The reasons for the German arrival and concentration are less clear but several tentative reasons can be advanced. Those would include the presence of the above noted German related institutions. Second, Girard Avenue was on the course of northward and westward movement of the upwardly mobile middle classes with German institutions advancing to north Broad Street after the Civil War and including Rodef Shalom Synagogue, the Central Presbyterian Church (by Collins and Autenreith) at Fairmount, as well as several German founded banks. In any event, by the 1890s, the Blue Book indicates that nearly half of the district's population who sought recognition in that social register was of German ancestry, and that proportion remained until just before World War I.

The presence of so many Germans by the late nineteenth century overwhelmed what had been a rather more diverse rural village called Francisville, which was centered essentially at the intersections of the Ridge Pike (Ridge Avenue) with Girard. To the south, on a cluster of streets laid out perpendicular to Ridge, and hence conflicting with the city grid, were smaller working class houses. Belonging to stone masons, and others in the building trades, these houses can still be found below Poplar Street. The 1877 Hopkins Atlas shows that Girard Avenue, on the other hand, had already become a center of larger houses, and institutions which included the already noted German hospitals, schools and churches, but also a Quaker Meeting, and Episcopal Church (St. Matthew's, organized 1822, and constructed circa 1850) and the Greenhill Presbyterian Church, designed by John Notman in 1847. These were more anglicizing and derived from the English mid-century Gothic Revival, and with the red brick rows on the 1600 and 1700 blocks of Girard describe the first phase of the region's growth.

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The German phase began around 1880, when developer William Weightman acquired several large tracts and constructed blocks of houses between Carlisle and 15th Streets, and between Ridge and 19th Street. This corresponded to a period of growth of several of the institutions, notably the enlargement of St. Joseph's College, and the construction of the Church of the Gesu, (cornerstone, 1879) all from designs by noted Catholic architect, E.F. Durang. The row blocks for Weightman, were both probably by the equally notable developer's architect, Willis G. Hale, though only 1816-24 Girard is documented. These made the breakthrough toward the more dramatic Germanic style that had characterized German breweries, and beer gardens in the 1870s. They were followed by a house for Frederick Poth on the 2000 block (1884) and by a residence for the Schmidt family, probably by brewrey architect Otto Wolf who in 1894 designed the stable for the house (2004 Girard). Though the houses of the 2000 block are of brownstone, and the Weightman houses are of brick, the florid surface articulation, the particular attention to framing of openings, and the level of detail without adopting the motifs of the English Queen Anne are evidence of German stylistic traits. The masterpiece of this group is Otto Wolf's first commission, the Northwestern National Bank of 1886 which adapted Furness' Centennial National Bank facade to the heavy framing and articulation which would become his personal style. Together with the row blocks and the florid brownstones, they provide the clearest evidence of the achievements of the German community in Philadelphia, and mark their growing cultural identity, which was represented by the growth of the German Society, and the men's choir (mannerchor) centered in North Philadelphia.

The later, classical styled bank of the Girard Avenue Title and Trust of 1906, by Wilson, Harris and Richards, marked the ongoing success of the Girard Avenue community, a generation after the construction of the Northwestern Bank. With the nearby Ridge Avenue Farmers Market and its adjacent Farmer's Hotel, from the mid-1870s, several shops, and the banks, a legitimate neighborhood commercial center was developed that forms one of the principal features of Philadelphia urban development, and that makes this a "City of Neighborhoods".

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Girard Avenue Historic District

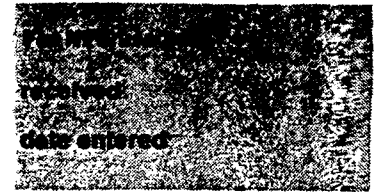
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Clio Index.

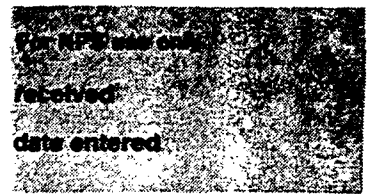
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Boundary Description:

Beginning at a point on the northwest corner of Girard Avenue and Carlisle Street and proceeding north along Carlisle Street 62 feet to the rear boundary line of properties fronting on the north side of Girard Avenue. Then proceeding west along said line 50 feet and north 48 feet to the south side of Flora Street, and continuing west along Flora Street to 15th Street.

Then proceeding across 15th Street to the west side and continuing west along the rear boundary lines of properties fronting on the north side of Girard Avenue, 395.6667 feet more or less, to the east side of 16th Street. Then crossing 16th Street to the east side and continuing west along the rear boundary lines of properties fronting on the north side of Girard Ave, 395'8" more of less, to the east side of 17th Street.

Then proceeding across 17th Street to the west side, and proceeding north, to the south side of Thompson Street. Then proceeding west along Thompson Street 395 feet 8 inches to east side of 18th Street, and south along 18th Street to a point 99 feet north of Girard Avenue.

Then crossing 18th Street to the west side, and continuing west along the rear boundary lines of properties fronting on the north side of Girard Avenue 100 feet to the east side of Cleveland Street.

Then proceeding in a southwesterly direction across Cleveland Street to a point 40' 0 1/8" north of Ridge Avenue. Then proceeding west 6" along the northern boundary line of 1813 Ridge Avenue to a point, and continuing along said boundary line in a southwesterly direction 41' 10 1/8" to Ridge Avenue. Then proceeding along the east side of Ridge Avenue 18' to Girard Avenue. Then crossing Ridge Avenue and continuing west 161 feet 6 7/8 inches to 19th Street. Then continuing west across 19th Street and 345 feet 8 inches to the east side of 20th Street.

Then crossing 20th Street to the west side, and proceeding north to the south side of South College Avenue. Then proceeding along South College Avenue 329 feet 7 3/8 inches to a point on the east side of Corinthian Avenue.

Then proceeding south, across Girard Avenue, and along Corinthian Avenue to the rear boundary line of 2028 Girard Avenue. Then proceeding east along said boundary line and continuing east along the rear boundary lines of properties fronting on the south side of Girard Avenue to a point 22 feet west of 20th Street. Then proceeding north 60 feet 6 inches and east 22 feet to the west side of 20th Street.

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Then proceeding east across 20th Street, to the east side, and continuing east along the rear boundary lines of properties fronting on the south side of Girard Avenue to the west side of 19th Street.

Then crossing 19th Street to a point on the east side 81 feet 6 1/2 inches south of Girard Avenue. Then proceeding east of said point 109 feet 4 inches and south 38 feet 6 inches to the rear boundary of 1822 Girard Avenue. Then proceeding east along the rear boundaries of numbers 1820 and 1822 Girard Avenue and in a north-easterly direction along the rear boundaries of 1816 and 1818 Girard Avenue to the point at the intersection of the northern and rear boundaries of 1828 Ridge Avenue. Then proceeding in a northeasterly direction along the eastern boundary of 1828 Ridge Avenue to the west side of Ridge.

Then proceeding across Ridge Avenue and continuing in an easterly direction along the rear boundaries of properties fronting on the south side of Girard Avenue to the west side of 18th Street.

Then continuing east across 18th Street and along the rear boundaries of properties fronting on the south side of Girard Avenue 395 feet 8 inches to the west side of 17th Street.

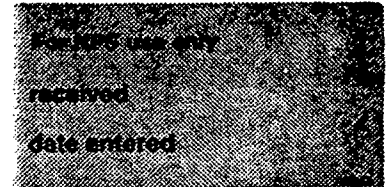
Then proceeding north along the west side of 17th Street to the south side of Girard Avenue. Then proceeding east along the south side of Girard Avenue to the east side of 16th Street. Then proceeding south along the east side of 16th Street to the north side of Cambridge Street.

Then proceeding east along the rear boundaries of properties fronting on the south side of Girard Avenue, 395 feet 8 inches to the west side of 15th Street.

Then crossing 15th Street to a point on the east side 114 feet 8 inches south of Girard Avenue being the rear boundary of a property fronting on Girard Avenue and continuing east along said line 195 feet 8 inches to the west side of Carlisle Street. Then proceeding north, along Carlisle Street, 114 feet 8 inches to Girard Avenue and across Girard Avenue to the north west corner of Girard Avenue and Carlisle Street and the place of beginning.

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**Boundary Justification:**

The Girard Avenue district consists of the buildings between Carlisle and Corinthian streets, fronting on Girard Avenue, and South College Avenue and differentiated from the surrounding area by scale and patronage, and unified by construction between the arrival of the trolleys in the 1880s, and the first years of this century. It is accented with significant houses and commercial buildings typically designed by German architects for German clients.

The buildings are typically three and four stories in height, oversized by Philadelphia standards, with a higher likelihood of custom design. Though related by function and era, the Ridge Avenue Market is excluded because it is already on the National Register, and because it relates to the earlier property grid off of Ridge Avenue. Similarly, the Girard College complex is excluded -- because it is on the National Register, and because its high wall significantly separates it from its community.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Attached.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 15 acres

Quadrangle name Philadelphia Quad

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

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

B 

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

C 

1	8	4	8	5	9	4	0	4	4	2	4	3	9	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

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

E 

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

F 

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

G 

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

H 

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

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Attached.

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 George E. Thomas, Ph.D.

organization Clio Group, Inc.

date May 13, 1985

street & number 3961 Baltimore Avenue

telephone (215) 386 - 6276

city or town Philadelphia

state Pennsylvania

## 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 Dr. Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer

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