

Middle Ridge Rural Historic District
Custer County
Zone 17 Marble Road
A E 432720 N 4439570 C E 447280 N 44385
B E 452080 N 4437660 D E 449360 N 4438700



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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 Middle Pickering Rural Historic District
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Pikeland, Yellow Springs, Merlin, Church, Pickering Roads N/A not for publication
city, town Charlestown, East Pikeland & West Pikeland Townships N/A vicinity
state Pennsylvania code PA county Chester code 029 zip code 19425

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>78</u>	<u>20</u>	buildings
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>15</u>	<u>2</u>	structures
		objects
<u>98</u>	<u>22</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 6

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 D. Glass Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

Date 7/3/97

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)

DOMESTIC/ single dwellings

AGRICULTURE/animal facility

AGRICULTURE/outbuilding

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwellings

AGRICULTURE/animal facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/vernacular farmhouse

MODERN MOVEMENT/ International Style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE/Sandstone

walls STONE/Sandstone(brownstone)

roof WOOD/shingle

other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Middle Pickering Rural Historic District is located in northern Chester County along the north boundary line of Charlestown Township and extends a short distance into both East and West Pikeland townships. It includes that middle portion of Pickering Creek which is fed by Pigeon Run, Auld (Old) Run, and lesser unnamed tributaries. The district has fifteen farmsteads of eighteenth or nineteenth century origin, many outbuildings and only a minimal number of non-contributing buildings scattered throughout the district. There are also two historic Lutheran congregations with their stone churches and cemeteries looking over the Pigeon Run valley from an extreme vantage point. The sites of two small industrial complexes along Pickering Creek and the tiny village of Merlin in East Pikeland township are included because of their support value to the Charlestown farmers, providing grain milling at an early date and a variety of manufacture thereafter. The district contains a total of 120 resources with 78 contributing buildings, 15 contributing structures, 5 contributing sites, 20 non-contributing buildings, 2 non-contributing structures, and no non-contributing sites.

All of the historic building in the district is native fieldstone with an occasional frame addition. Barns and outbuildings are built, with two exceptions, with stone stables, stone end walls and frame forebays or in-fills. Exceptions to the stone barns are a large Swisser frame barn on stone foundations on Map site #20 and a small frame hay barn at Merlin crossroads (Map #34). It is a highly preserved rural district of 1055 acres immediately adjacent to the Nationally Registered Charlestown Village Historic District. The over two mile vista of rolling farmland and wooded hills is singularly protected from twentieth century intrusions by 300' to 400' rising hillsides.

Pickering Creek, with its tributaries, waters the Uwchlans, the Pikelands, Charlestown and Schuylkill townships, emptying into the Schuylkill River between Phoenixville and Valley Forge. The Middle Pickering designation for purposes of this nomination encompasses that point where three townships (Charlestown, East & West Pikeland) join, and which have traditionally interacted one with the other. It lays 200-300 feet above sea level with the Pikeland Overlook at the Lutheran churches rising sharply to 400 feet. Underlaid with both Hybrid and Graphitic Gneiss on shallow to deep, silty soils (Glenelg-Manor-Chester), it is very conducive to general farming, dairying and livestock raising, which enticed and held the Welsh farmers, and to which the later mix of German farmers added their approval. Good building stone was amply available with or without quarrying to erect the brownstone buildings found in the region.

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Nineteen of the thirty-four properties are still held in agriculture or related endeavors, several as horse farms and three as stock farms. Pastures, fence rows, wooded tracts and cropland create a setting for eighteenth/nineteenth century farm homes. The land use pattern is of moderately-sized farmsteads on tracts dispersed from each other along quiet rural roads. Most of the buildings are set back from the roads, and are so situated within the folds of hills that one views another only from a distance, if at all. The lack of modern infill and absence of distracting noise or glow of far off lights creates a timeless feeling. A stone arch bridge and an iron truss bridge on winding creek roads add to the rural feeling.

While land parcels can be traced back to first deeds of 1000 acres or more, the present parcels reflect with surprising accuracy the smaller 100-150 acre tracts found on tax lists in 1722 as "Actual Settlers": Rees Prees, Griffith Pritchard, Llewelyn Davis, Alexander Owen, all of whom were Welsh farmers who willed their holdings to sons and daughters for a hundred years or more until the German farmers from the Pikelands gained ownership of some of the plots through marriages or purchase. It has always been an agricultural area, with the few commercial endeavors - grist and saw mills, distillery and a creamery - being secondary to farming practices and only conducted to meet the needs of the local people. The distillery and creamery were the only early businesses that sent their products beyond the township, processing grains and dairy products of the well-kept farms. The eighteenth/nineteenth century saw commercial activities concentrated along the narrow banks of the Pickering Creek in East Pikeland Township near Merlin where the early grist mill was converted into an iron foundry and machine shop as well as a chair bending factory and snuff mill at various times. For awhile, threshing machines were made there, emphasizing still the symbiosis between farming and a few trades in the district.

In general, the houses are of a simple vernacular style, rectangular, well-proportioned, gable roofed, two and a half stories with either a modest frame addition or early stone add-on. Porches remain on seven of the houses, and seven more use the simple doorway hood with two supporting posts. Eight of the contributing houses utilize the ell-shape, stemming from incorporation of early dwellings at the rear, while fourteen exhibit the lateral addition into a rectangle or square. The bank house so often seen in Chester County's rolling terrain appears only occasionally in the Middle Pickering district. The above repetition of features creates an overall impression of farmhouse style as found in the stone architecture of southeastern Pennsylvania.

The Farmhouse Style is seen in two variations in the district, rectangular or square, and ell-shaped. The most formal of the dwellings are those of Peter Wells (Map #5) and of Alexander Owen (Map #13). The Wells house, rectangular and double pile, began as a two-bay wide, two bay deep stone house to which was added three bays equally deep. Tax records indicate this was accomplished before the end of the 18th century. A prominent cornice spans

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the extended facade. A garden room and 3-car garage were added in 1963 to the west gable, and at some time, two dormer windows were added to the gable roof on both the north and south exposures. A large stone and frame barn (1810, rebld. 1941) with wagonshed/corn crib attached is situated a fair distance from the house. No other outbuildings remain on this farmstead.

The Alexander Owen main house is originally ell-shaped, the rear ell being a three story in-bank style. The front, however, appears on the top of the bank as a broadly balanced and laterally extended early nineteenth century dwelling to which twentieth century further additions with garage were drawn by architect, G. Edwin Brumbaugh. Windows in the early 19th century section are somewhat larger than in typical farmhouses of the area, having 8 over 12 lights, indicating an above average ownership of this farm. Unlike the Peter Wells house and barn, the Alexander Owen farm has not only retained its large bank barn (1774-1818), but also its tenant house (which probably was the first dwelling, c.1750), its springhouse with washhouse attached, root cellar in perfect condition, as well as a machinery shed and other outbuildings that are still in use. The carriage house has been turned into an implement building on the original foundations. One story horse stables have been added to the north gable barn wall and a drive-through implement shed has been constructed. It has also kept its silo.

A still further progression of the Pennsylvania Farmhouse Style is seen in the Davis/Fisher homestead (Map #18) which was built in 1893. Although a style not repeated in the district, it departs from the 18th/early 19th century farmhouse style to the popular Second Empire architecture of the later 19th century. Originally a farmhouse of plain style built before 1756, part of which remains, was thoroughly remodelled in 1893 to a large, near square, stone house with a five bay facade, four bays deep. Its handsome well proportioned mansard roof with deep bracketed cornice and inviting Eastlake porch on two sides was in 1893 something new to the farming community in Charlestown. Much of the barn roofcaved in after a heavy snow storm in 1958, but the gable walls remain to support a new gambrel roof replacement. There is a corn crib, a milkhouse, carriage house, springhouse and smokehouse. Most importantly, the widow's house, ordered in Llewelyn David's 1756 Will to be built for his widow, still stands at the edge of the front lawn of the 1893 house. Originally a one story house, the widow's dwelling has several frame and stone additions, but is still a small house.

Included in the district are a few twentieth century examples of the International Style, notable among them, as Map #27, is the nationally registered home of the late renowned architect, Oskar Stonorov. Map #20, 25 and 29 also include expressions of his work and theories, while Map #22 holds two early 'Pre-Fab' experiments of Stonorov's active mind. Map #24, non-contributing because of building dates (1980), carries the imaginative art into the present decade with two plastered stone dwellings mating well with the Stonorov style.

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Except for springhouses, which generally have been kept, only the Griffith Jones (Map #1), the Alexander Owen (Map #13), and the Davis/Fisher (Map #18) farmsteads have retained a complement of early farm outbuildings. Corn cribs and wagonsheds have generally been attached to barns. Fifteen major barns stand near their domiciles. Ten are typical stone end, frame forebay, gable-roofed rectangles, some with flanging sheds, two are closed stone end-walls with frame infill and recessed stone stable walls, and one is a frame barn on stone stable foundation. A curious barn practice is found in rebuilt or later barns of the area, for what reason is not known, wherein the west gable end is stone to the ridge but stone only to the square on the east. Noticeably absent are the ventilation slits in the stone gables so common among German barns. Only one barn (Map #5) has slits. It also incorporates a dormer in the center of the frame forebay, a product of the 1941 rebuilding. The barn on Map #13 has a full projecting central straw bay over the stable, also a later stylistic innovation. The barns range in date from c1774 to c1859. Several were built between 1820 and 1825. All are bank barns and none have double decker floors or bridges under the ramp to the barn floor. As changing farm practices dictate, few silos have been kept. Map #11 is the notable exception, having two tile silos.

Remaining and complementing these barns and houses as contributing structures are four root cellars, three smokehouses, one free standing corn crib (plus seven incorporated into other buildings), fifteen springhouses, two churches, one Pony Truss iron bridge, one stone arch bridge, and one modern concrete bridge. The contributing sites in the district are two saw mill sites (Map #5 & 29), two grist mill sites (Map #29 & 32) and the graveyards for the two churches. The graveyards are part of the present landscape in their entirety. The races and dams are visible for the saw and grist mills. The first and second grist mills were Revolutionary in period, the second completely gone from the present landscape, and a third operating into the 20th century as a saw, grist and cider mill on Map #32. This third mill is presently a second dwelling on the property. The first mill site on Map #29 provided many adaptive uses to the area until about 1935.

The district is further enhanced by the undisturbed areas surrounding Davis Bridge #178. (Map #26) This picturesque single lane 69 foot iron-span over the Pickering Creek at Pickering and Lincoln Roads supports the visual and historical qualities of the district. Built in 1894 by Denithorne & Son, a Phoenixville firm, and using structural iron made by the Phoenix Iron Company, then one of the leading bridge companies in the United States, Davis Bridge is an excellent example of the Pony Truss, latticed bridge used extensively over small streams before 1940. There were many such bridges in the county, most of which have been replaced in the last decade with two lane, concrete bridges wider than the roads they service.

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The tiny village of Merlin adds to the rustic, country ambiance providing the all-necessary country store, post office, grist and cider mill, and two or three tradesmen - a shoemaker and two cigar factory/stores from mid-nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. Widespread use of the automobile after 1940 brought its usefulness to an end. For many years, Merlin, directly on the Pickering Creek, performed, with the larger Charlestown Village, all the support trades that the farmer needed. Together, Merlin and the Middle Pickering valley farms create a cohesive view of an era in country life that is fast disappearing.

Part of this rural fabric are the Pikeland churches which stand on glebe land set aside for them as early as 1762 when it is named as such in records of The Pikeland Company. The first stone building, replacing a log church, was erected in 1811. The church seen today as Lower Pikeland (because it stands a little lower on the hill) was a replacement after a fire in 1835. Its style is two stories, very chaste and simple with a balcony on three sides. It has only recently (1988) received a steeple. The Upper Pikeland Church, Evangelical Lutheran, stands a short distance higher on the hill, and was built in 1843 and rebuilt with its present configuration in 1882. Originally in the simple style of the Lower church, it was given the high Gothic roof and pointed arch windows at the time of rebuilding. The window heads and door head are trimmed in cut, green serpentine stone. Both churches place their entrances in a gable end with a projecting chancel at the opposite gable end.

The rural integrity of this district is surpassed by none in Charlestown or the surrounding townships. Even the non-contributing houses, save one, (a brick one-story on a hilltop, Map #12), and few minor outbuildings built after the period of significance, blend with the contributing character of the terrain in such a way as to be unobtrusive and non-dominating to the visual pattern. The overall landscape of the Middle Pickering Rural Historic District is one of serene quiet tucked beyond the crests of its several hills.

In sharp contrast is the surrounding area. Immediately west and north of the valley are tightly-built repeated residential developments in the Pikelands, and expansion of the Kimberton area. Just out of sight on the east township line is industrial Schuylkill Valley sprawl and Phoenixville Borough, while the Pennsylvania Turnpike cuts its swath through southwestern Charlestown Township. The land between the turnpike and Route 30 is transversed by Route 202's maze of corporate centers and light industrial parks, with housing for their employees rising into the farms of Charlestown and beyond. Farm after farm has been devoured in the last ten years in the three subject townships with a long list waiting for approval. None as yet are visible from the naturally protected valley of this nomination. There are no gas stations, no mini-malls, no convenience stores, public houses nor 'through' traffic within the district bounds.

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The Middle Pickering district is a rare survival of the rural way of life. It conveys a bucolic sense of nineteenth century Welsh/German agricultural community, trading its dairy farms for beef, horses, sheep and goats. All of the major 18th century farmsteads are represented in their 19th century progressions and agricultural settings. Somewhat isolated by geographic nature from surrounding development, the district is a grouping of high quality stone farm buildings, usually set back from narrow, winding, lightly travelled roads, separated by fields, pastures, tree-lined creeks and fence rows. This classic country 19th century environment, disappearing so quickly in Chester County, is preserved by owner-operated, sometimes custom-farmed agricultural land-use practices.

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)

AGRICULTURE
ARCHITECTURE
EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

Period of Significance

1750-1945

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Stonorov, Oskar

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

The Middle Pickering Rural Historic District represents the patterns of settlement, agriculture and architecture that domesticated this small valley thirty miles west of the early bounds of Philadelphia. The district is important to Charlestown township and the surrounding area because it is one of a very few places left almost wholly undisturbed by modern land developments, and which can still portray the evolution of 200 years of man's architectural and agricultural endeavors in the region. An unusually fine grouping of high integrity, late 18th, 19th and 20th century individual small farmsteads, the plots are situated on tracts of land that adhere closely to their early boundaries. Lying just outside the confines of the "Welsh Tract", these plantations of 100 to 150 acres each, set an early design for later migrations of Welsh and German farming communities. Covering a long period of significance (1750-1945), the architectural spectrum is wide. While most of the built environment reflects southeastern Pennsylvania farmhouse style - well-proportioned, heavy, substantial, field stone, 2½ story, gable roof -, one important but small block carries into the 20th century International style under the strong, young ideas of European-born architect, Oskar Stonorov. With this exception, the otherwise overall pattern portrayed in the architectural landscape is typical of southeastern Pennsylvania dispersed communities described by some as the rise of individualism.

Reflecting a Welsh Baptist and Presbyterian background from the Chester Valley, agriculturally oriented acreages were early formed out of still earlier, larger, Philadelphia investment tracts. Charles Pickering, a lawyer who came on the ship Welcome to Philadelphia in 1682, explored the creek valleys almost immediately and thought he found silver in the sands in this area. Laying claim to 5350 acres with 16 Philadelphia investors by 1685, Pickering's 'silver' turned out to be lead. Pickering was swept overboard on a return trip to England in 1699, and his investor/friends disposed of the lands in 50 to 150 acre parcels during the next several decades. Although William Penn favored emphasis on the village, actual settlement in this valley, occurring by 1715, was almost entirely on individual farm plots whether they were large acreages or small. Within the district, the turn of the 19th century saw side-by-side development of agricultural pursuits and major con-

See continuation sheet

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struction, replacing the first rudimentary log buildings with substantial, well-proportioned stone dwellings and barns. During this period, the farms became well-established, houses were enlarged and outbuildings erected.

The Middle Pickering area is representative of the way in which much of northern Chester County was settled by farmer/tradesmen, for every Welsh countryman, no matter how wealthy, was expected to ply a trade as well as farm. The farmer's trade often supplied his identification, i.e., Llewelyn, the Hammerer (blacksmith), or Llewelyn, the Sawyer, or the Tailor, or the Weaver. It filled the place of a surname, so lost in the early Welsh system of father/son linkage, i.e., John ap Thomas - John, the son of Thomas. Forced beyond the Welsh Tract, it having quickly filled, second and third generation sons looked for new soils. In this case, the Welsh farmer moved up from the Chester Valley to the rolling highlands of Charlestown Township above the North Valley Hills. Sons of well-known families brought the names of David, Griffith, Jones, Owens and Pritchard to the Middle Pickering valley, and with them, both the agricultural way of life and the solid, stone architectural traditions of their forefathers.

For many years, the Welsh culture thrived with strong ties to the families and churches of Tredyffrin. Not until 1743 was the small Charlestown Presbyterian church, a splinter of the Great Valley Presbyterian church, built in the township. A Baptist church was built in West Vincent township in 1737, but it was almost as far away as the Tredyffrin Baptist church. However, between the Vincent Baptist church and the Charlestown landowners was a larger community of German-speaking Lutherans who, after meeting in their homes since 1761, built a log church in 1771 on the highest hill in Pikeland township. This church and its subsequent stone churches overlooked the Charlestown valley. Since the Germans were friendly and anxious to know their neighbors, the language barrier was easily overcome. Interest in good farming brought about a symbiosis of respect and endeavor. Marriages of children brought a further cohesion of families that trials of the Revolution bonded still closer. The nineteenth century saw names in the valley change to Longacre, Schneider, Sloyer, Pennypacker, Detwiler and Rixstine.

The industrious husbandry of the Germans enhanced the already thriving Welsh farms. It was the Germans who built the distillery and creamery and the early grist mill, but the naturally productive soils superceded industry. As the Schuylkill Canal opened (1824), and the railroads followed (Pennsylvania RR, 1834; Reading RR, 1842 with a Pickering Branch to Chester Springs, 1872), Philadelphia markets became available to Charlestown farmers. Changing from an 18th century grazing and grain economy to one that included animal husbandry and small produce, dairies were enlarged and poultry for market was added. "Milk trains" were scheduled at convenient stations. Butter became a quantity item shipped to the city in wooden crates at 25¢ a pound. Cheeses and fresh produce in season became marketable as six trains a day came and went from nearby Chester Springs by 1900. This continuous expansion of agricultural markets kept the farms in pristine condition until after World War I.

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While the economic depression of 1929 had some deep semi-isolated effect on the valley economy, the automobile had a stronger, more lasting one. Although farm goods dropped to give-away prices, the farmer with a piece of land could survive, but the length of the hard times into 1940-41 sent the always resilient farmer by automobile into the towns in search of a second income. At the same time, land prices were low. Philadelphia money again invested in the township for country places. As World War II came to a close and the economic restructuring of the 1950's took hold, the Middle Pickering farms began to bloom again. Today, hay farming, stock farms and several horse farms predominate with one fold of sheep and a goat farm. Although agriculture is no longer the economic factor that it once was in maintaining the farmsteads, the general characterization of country farm scenes is still visible, with the automobile continuing to supply the means to a supporting second income.

The concentration of substantial stone farm buildings, each holding architectural and individual integrity, is above average for the township and surrounding areas. Notable in the Middle Pickering district is the uninterrupted repetition of farmstead after farmstead, highlighting well-kept dwellings, barns and outbuildings centered in the original setting of fields and fence rows.

Although each farm compound has had some minor rearrangement or even demolition of small unused outbuildings, major change, with the notable exception of Stonorov's work, has been almost non-existent since the Civil War, limited to enclosure of porches or addition of modest-sized wings. Some have not been changed at all except for internal modernizing. [Map #1, 14, 16, 19 & 28]

The southeastern Pennsylvania farmhouse style is seen in several variations. No two dwellings are alike in the district. Map #5 is a fine example of the almost square farmhouse, built in two stages (2 bay and 3 bay) before 1800 and joined in careful proportion to present a formal 5 bay appearance. Not far away but out of sight of #5 is Map #13 with probably the greatest retention of original buildings in the district. With its 20th century Brumbaugh additions to the main house, a farm progression over 200 years is clearly evidenced. On the northeast corner of Pikeland and Merlin roads is a later set of farm buildings, Map #11, the stone barn dating c.1810 and the house c.1835. This set of buildings was built for the daughter and son-in-law of the first owner of Map #13, pointing to long family tenure.

Map #18 has the longest family history of any farm in the district, and indeed, in much of rural Pennsylvania. Still owned by descendants of Llewelyn David, who moved here in 1739, it has passed through family lines for 250 years, and is still being farmed by descendants. Its 1893 dignified Second Empire house, softened by the wide, graceful Eastlake porch caused it to be used by Atlantic/Richfield Company in 1938 with a red convertible automobile beside its picket fence to advertise the slogan "Atlantic keeps your car on the go."

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Map #10, a hidden residence with large barn in East Pikeland township, reflects its 18th/19th century appearance very clearly. Beginning as a two bay stone building, the house was extended laterally along the hillside with two more bays to create the four-bay stone facade seen today. The frame two bay addition to the west, was a separate, two story summer kitchen moved close and attached in the late 19th century. No further changes have been made other than the enclosure of porches. The large stone barn retains its barnyard wall. The bankhouse variation (Map #1) is also found in the district, but not as often as in other parts of northern Chester County.

Two farmhouses use unusual stone that was probably hauled some distance, indicating the above average architectural awareness of the owners and the economic ease that made it possible. One is Map #15, the other Map #6. Map #15 is supposed to be very early, possibly the earliest stone house in the district. It uses flat faced field stone in an uncommon light-colored mixture of brown, whitish and light blue stone, ashlar laid, possibly hauled from the Tredyffrin/Whitelands limestone region of the Chester Valley. Map #6 in West Pikeland township is believed to have been built in 1772 by Thomas Roberts. The stone in this building is dark in color, and also flat faced. It probably is stone with a high degree of graphite in it native to the geologic underlay of parts of West Pikeland. Both houses are two bays wide, the Pikeland house an unusual four bays deep.

Surprising in a rural district of traditional, though varied, architecture is a collection of innovative styles created in the imaginative mind of Oskar Stonorov. Having married in 1938 the daughter of a local resident, Frank B. Foster, they made Map # 27 their home. (National Register, 1975) Built on the foundation and walls of an older house, Stonorov transformed the farmhouse into a totally contemporary architectural and personal statement. In the International Style - flat roofs, rounded corners, lots of glass, and longitudinal in design - this house advocates modern architecture in a rural setting. A three story building of plastered walls and vertical cypress siding, the house faces south to view the Pickering meadows - part of Stonorov's intention to bind together nature and the built environment.

Stonorov was among the first to bring the International Style to this country and was a leading figure in redevelopment of Philadelphia. He designed one of the first federally funded housing projects in the country. Rebellious against architectural tradition, his design is sometimes said to be sculptural. He became interested in low-income housing projects before their time was popular and looked for ways to use efficiency to short cut costs. Map #22 includes two small, box-like, metal, prefabricated houses which were Stonorov's first experiments into this field. They are still lived in today. Using stock, production-line windows and materials, they were called "Harmon Houses". Although less than fifty years old, these houses contribute to the district's architectural significance.

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Stonorov worked with Philadelphia's Mayor Joseph Clark and with City Planner and neighbor, Edmund Bacon, to beautify central Philadelphia. Along Pickering Road, in Charlestown and East Pikeland townships, there are two examples of his indoor/outdoor, living-with-nature style. Map #29, Bacon's home, which opened a typically tight Pennsylvania stone tenant dwelling to the natural beauty of its surroundings, represents a collaboration of these two minds. The original building is left almost in-tact, but adds a one-floor, pointed stone wall entrance door projected forward from the old house and connected by full glass side walls. The entrance door leads to a glassed corridor along the side of the house and a scenic view of Pickering Creek.

The second example is Map #25, wherein Stonorov removed the whole west wall of the bank house and attached a full building that breathes light and air to the older interior. The new wing stands behind pine trees and allows the exterior to be dominated by the original farm tenant house.

Map #20, however, probably received as much publicity as any, when in the early 40's. artist/owner, Lucius Crowell, worked with Stonorov to create a studio wing to the west of the c1850 farmhouse, and connect it with a one-story glass kitchen. This introduced the then novel idea of the party-kitchen, living and dining areas completely open to each other. It attracted much attention at the time, being featured in Life and other magazines. Stonorov called it going back to the hearth-centered home. A most tireless and optimistic power behind urban modernization and innovative design, Stonorov was killed in an airplane crash in 1970 while on a UAW project with Walter Reuther.

The only crossroad center within the district is a tiny hamlet called Merlin. This was an outgrowth of the grist and saw mill complex found on Map #29 a short distance south of the crossing of two trails now called Pickering Road and Merlin Road. This mill was built by Conrad Sheimer and rented to George Emery for £9/year as early as 1765. By 1790, a second grist mill was operating nearer the crossroad and was operated by George Clemens. One or both of these mills ground grain for the Encampment at Valley Forge in 1777/8. After the second mill was built, the first mill provided multiple services to the Middle Pickering region - a snuff mill, a chair bending factory, a machine shop and foundry - and had numerous frame and stone buildings up to the first World War. One-by-one, the buildings were lost to fires, and the stone foundry, adapted c.1830 to a snuff mill and tenant dwelling, Map #29, is the only building remaining. The dam and raceway and some stone foundations remain visible.

The second mill was operated until approximately 1840 when a third mill was erected by Levi Crater between the two earlier mills. It is this third mill that stands today converted into a dwelling, and it is this mill that generated enough activity to cause a general store with post office, a shoe-maker, and two tobacco or cigar factory/stores to flourish. The need to name the post office promoted the name Merlin, chosen at random, it is said,

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by Theodore Reed, Postmaster and storekeeper, for a pretty picture of the small kestrel or hawk of that name. Map #30 thru #34 are all that remain of the little community, although a few new houses, not included in the district, have been built nearby within the last ten years. The house on the east side of Pickering Creek, Map #30, was the miller's house for the second mill. When 22 acres was cut off for the third mill, the stone house (Map #32) was built for the new miller, Levi Crater.

On the northwest corner, the Reed family built a house with the general store attached to the east gable. They built a stone barn on the southwest corner. The barn was demolished about 1930, but a frame hay barn on the actual corner remains. The Reed house eventually included the post office, built onto the west end of the house and dry goods store. The post office operated from 1887 to 1903. The store operated into the 1930's. In the 1940s, over a period of years, Harold Lightcap built a stone house (Map #34). using stone from the Reed barn, with the construction methods of the 19th century.

Collectively, these buildings illustrate the areas's architectural retention of historic 18th/19th century physical and cultural images important to the period of significance, 1750-1945, and which have not been given over to great change. The valley retains its distinctive, traditional, agricultural and rural landscape in the face of the massive urbanization of surrounding areas. While other stream valleys have kept a farmhouse and barn, the compounds lose their rural ambiance when cloistered by multiples of development houses.

Three Ponds, a development on Pikeland Road adjacent to the Middle Pickering district on the south but out of sight because of terrain and trees, has enveloped the farmhouse with 26 lots, a wide circular roadway and wide estate-like entrance. The feeling of farm is totally obliterated. Hollow Run development on Hartman Run has similarly wrapped 24 lots around its farmhouse and redesigned the barn to look residential. Its several tiers of large lots and cul-de-sacs, while leaving a bit of 'open space' along the stream and busy Route 29, permanently erases any rural feeling. It is urban.

West Pikeland township, a part of which is in this district, has, out of 60 some barns noted on an 1883 map, only seven left in the entire township which are still used as barns. The Middle Pickering Rural Historic District claims 15 barns, one of which makes up the seven in West Pikeland. Uwchlan township, touching Charlestown on the west, has two farms left from a not-so-long ago totally rural township. Similar stories can be told for East Pikeland, East & West Vincent, Schuylkill and all other townships surrounding Charlestown township. In East Pikeland township alone, population has grown 32% since 1980.

That over 1000 acres has been held out from development is a credit to Charlestown stewards. Present owners are very aware of the trust they hold for future generations. Vincent Kling, himself a renowned and international

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architect, and owner of Map #13, has not only maintained the integrity of his own farm and buildings, but also as supervisor takes an active role in township response to development pressures. Active on the Planning Commission are Michael Churchill and John Foster (Map #23, 24). With this kind of concerned leadership, the Middle Pickering Rural Historic District bodes well to remain an architecturally and agriculturally significant valley.

The assimilation of two cultural elements in the valley epitomized both the diversity of settlers and their fusion into a new way of life. The transformation was so extensive that Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, himself an immigrant, claimed that a new people had arisen who could now be called Americans. Most pre-Revolutionary migrations to New England and to the Chesapeake and South had established exclusionary regulations against other Europeans and even against some fellow countrymen. In contrast, William Penn's Holy Experiment was practiced literally in his colony, and it brought a blending of ideas and families to the Middle Pickering region, as throughout Pennsylvania, where the British/Welsh and German cultures faced each other as neighbors. Taking the best of two similar cultures, the Middle Pickering Rural Historic District preserves both the strong, stone architectural heritage and the agricultural way of life that settled the valley in the eighteenth century - an oasis in the maze of subdivision and development.

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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

Acreage of property 1055 acres.

UTM References

A 18 452720 4439590
Zone Easting Northing

C 18 449260 4436590

B 18 452060 44317610
Zone Easting Northing

D 18 449360 44318910

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at a point on the south side of Merlin Road (#15046) and a corner of Charlestown Tax Parcel #35-3-23 [Map #1], thence following said tax parcel 1450' SW to Wells Road; thence along Wells Road SW 500' Yellow Springs Road (#15009); thence continuing SW along the several boundary lines of TP #35-3-23 and crossing Yellow Springs Road. Thence still following TP #35-3-23 NW the several courses to Foster Road; thence SW 195' along Foster Road and TP #35-3-6.1 [Map #2] to a corner of same. See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Middle Pickering Rural Historic District are determined by two elements: traditional farm boundaries and topography. Chosen to include all that area that has an homogeneity of architecture, history and character conducive to a rural agricultural landscape, they reach the topographical high points that surround the drainage basins for Pigeon Run,

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Estelle Cremers

organization French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust date February 17, 1991

street & number Box #360, R.D.#2 telephone 215-469-0150 or 215-469-6977

city or town Pottstown state PA zip code 19464

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Verbal Boundary Description continued:

Thence NW along boundary line of TP 35-3-6.1 to the township boundary line; thence NE along the said township line 4800' to the westernmost corner of TP #35-3-10 [Map #5], a corner with TP #34-2-8 [Map #6]. Thence NW along said TP #34-2-8 to Street Road, and thence along the south side of Street Road NE 300' to a point opposite the SW corner of the Lutheran Churches cemetery. Crossing Street Road NW to said Cemetery corner, and continuing along western boundary line of cemetery NW 500'; thence NE 200' to Clover Mill Road (#15050)* and crossing said road into East Pikeland Township. Thence NW along the east side of Clover Mill Road and TP #26-4-79 [the most northerly part of Map #11] to Church Road. Thence along the boundary lines of TP #26-4-79 & 79.1 several courses NE and SE to Merlin Road (#15046). Thence SW along said road and land of TP #26-4-78 [Map #10] to the township line marking East Pikeland and Charlestown townships. Thence along township line NE 1475' to the SW corner of East Pikeland TP #26-4-83 [Map #34]. Following said property NW to Merlin Road, and crossing same to TP #26-4-76 [Map #33]; thence NE along said property line to Pickering Road and SE on Pickering Road a short distance to the south side of State Bridge #15-1023-0070-2765 over Pickering Creek. Crossing said creek and following the south side of Merlin Road along the property lines of TP #26-4-57.3 and 26-4-57 [Map #30 & 29]. Thence along property line of 26-4-57 to Pickering Creek and downstream its several courses to the East Pikeland/Charlestown township line. Thence NE along the township line 2500' to the NE corner of Charlestown TP #35-1-4 [the NE corner of Map #27] and thence SE along TP #35-1-4 and TP #35-1-12 [Map #20] approximately 1275'; thence through TP 35-1-12 NE in a line paralleling the township line approximately 1065'; thence through said TP #35-1-12 S 31° E, 425' to a corner with TP 35-2-7. [Map #18]. Thence through TP #35-2-7 S 40° 38' E approximately 850' to a farm driveway and continuing the same direction another 200' to a point in the north line of TP #35-2-7.2 [included in Map #18]. Thence through TP #35-2-7.2, dividing it roughly in half, 155.47' to its southern boundary. Thence S 42° 20' W approximately 100' and thence SE, paralleling the main farm driveway 300' to a point. Thence NE paralleling Charlestown Road 600' to TP #35-2-7.1 [Map #19]. Following the boundaries of TP #35-2-7.1 three courses to again reach Charlestown Road. Thence SW along Charlestown Road to a point where the northeasternmost boundary of the Nationally Registered Charlestown Village Historic District meets the Middle Pickering Rural Historic District. Thence SW along said Charlestown Village District boundary four courses (800', 1500', 200' & 700') totalling 3200' to Church Road (#15034). Thence across Church Road to the boundary line of TP #35-1-7.1 [Map #15] and following those lines SW and NW to jointure with TP #35-3-65 [Map #14] seven courses to Pikeland Road (#15050). Thence along the east side of Pikeland Road and TP #35-3-49.1 [Map #13] NW to a point across from the north side of Wells Road. Crossing Pikeland Road to Wells Road, the district boundary follows said road SW and NW along the property lines of TP #35-3-48 to Merlin Road and a corner with TP #35-3-10 [Map #5]. Thence SW along the north side of Merlin Road 3200' to the place of beginning.

* Clover Mill Road and Pikeland Road carry the same county road number, 15050. Clover Mill being the road name in West Pikeland and Pikeland being the road name in Charlestown township.

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Middle Pickering Rural Historic District
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Boundary Justification continued:

Auld Run and several unnamed wetlands that flow into the middle section of Pickering Creek. Reaching into three townships, the boundaries include farmsteads, historic churches and one small crossroad hamlet, all of which have interacted to create and retain a cohesive feeling of community. The district lays chiefly along the northern boundary of Charlestown township, a line almost as old as Chester County itself, having been set in 1683 for Charles Pickering and William Bacon, and on which in 1700, Joseph Pike's 10,093½ acres for Pikeland Township was anchored.

The northern boundary is drawn northward in the center through a corner of West and East Pikeland townships to include the highest peak whereon the Pikeland churches overlook the Pigeon Run valley. Following property lines in East Pikeland township, the line then drops south along tax parcel lines and Merlin Road to the township line. It continues NE along the township line to tax parcel 26-4-83 at which juncture it proceeds northwest along that property line to the tiny village of Merlin. This progression is to exclude eight non-historic modern houses that have been built along Merlin Road in East Pikeland township in the last decade. These houses are grouped in a lowland along a short part of Pigeon Run and do not figure in the visual character of the district. At the crossroad called Merlin, the district follows historic boundaries of the store and early mill lots whose commercial activities supported the farmers of the district.

The eastern district boundary line is set to accommodate three historic farm complexes (Map #18, 19, & 20) without including undue acres of minimal historic value. The southern district boundary follows Charlestown Road (#15049) southeast to a point where it meets the northern boundary of Nationally Registered Charlestown Village Historic District, a ridge line abutting the Middle Pickering Rural Historic District for 3200' in a southeasterly direction to Church Road (#15034). The district then follows property lines of Map #15 and #14 to Pikeland Road (#15050) and Map #13. It turns SW and NW along Tax Parcel 35-3-48 to Merlin Road. This includes the south ridge line and compensatory view shed to the north ridge line of the Pikeland Churches, one looking across at the other (seen in Photo #1).

Following the north side of Merlin Road west to the property lines of TP 35-3-23 [Map #1], the district follows those property lines north and the western lines of TP35-3-6.1 to the township line. This ends the district at a western point along Pigeon Run beyond which the rural character changes into more fragmented and fissured topography and development. The settlement and land use of this district was typical of much of Charlestown township's rolling upland terrain until the recent heavy residential and light industrial building boom changed one half of the township into suburbia. Having escaped this change of character, the Middle Pickering Rural Historic District reflects the agricultural and architectural past of the area in a way that no other part of the township can presently do.