

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 Gehman, John Farm
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Township Road not for publication
city, town Seisholtzville (Hereford Township) vicinity N/A
state PA code PA county Berks code 011 zip code 18062

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>7</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>7</u>	<u>0</u> objects
			<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
Farms in Berks County, Pa.

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Brent D. Glass, PA Historical & Museum Commission

Signature of certifying official [Signature] Date 3/2/92

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 dwelling
 Agriculture: storage
 Agriculture: agricultural outbuilding
 Agriculture: agricultural field

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: single dwelling
 Agriculture: storage
 Agriculture: agricultural outbuilding
 Agriculture: agricultural field

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: Swiss Bank House
 Other: Pennsylvania Bank Barn

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone
 walls log, stone, wood
 roof slate, tin
 other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The John Gehman Farm occupies 87 acres on both sides of a scenic dirt road in Hereford Township. The region is hilly with a stream, wetlands and woods interspersed with small fields. The creek, a small tributary of the Perkiomen, runs from west to east near the center of the farm with moderately sloping land extending from its adjoining meadow in northeasterly and southwesterly directions. South of the creek, where the land ascends toward the road, are the farmstead buildings. These include a unique Swiss bankhouse, other multi-purpose domestic buildings, a large stone barn, and other stone agricultural buildings. The house and springhouse are closest to the stream, facing east with their south gable ends built into the bank. The barn, wagon shed and stable are a short distance uphill, along the road. Farm fields and woodlots are located south of the road, and north of the creek, where they are reached by lanes. In its location, design, materials, workmanship and overall setting, this farm recalls an early nineteenth century hill farm. Its feeling of antiquity is enhanced by its luxuriant vegetation, large trees and shrubs throughout the yard area, meadow pasture, and fencerows; and by its wood fencing, post and rail and worm fence, once common, now extremely rare; and by its setting on one of the few dirt roads left in the county. Added to this is the presence of two architectural gems, the house and barn, original in all important features, reminiscent of an important time and place in the history of Berks County agriculture, the beginning of its "golden age."

Building Inventory:

1. House: Swiss bank house, c.1767, 2.5 stories, stone basement and first floor level, braced corner post log walls on the second floor, kicked roof of shingles, open rafters, 8/8 and 12/8 window sashes, corner and end fireplaces, basement kitchen with end fireplace. Log walls exposed on three sides, with horizontal siding of wide beaded boards on north end. Log addition of 1970s of a combination kitchen-art studio matches earlier construction materials and does not detract from original. Addition has wood shake roof.

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Gehman, Joh, Farm

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2. House #2: Vernacular stone farmhouse, c.1810, 2.5 stories, central chimney, four bays, slate roof, pegged window frames, fireplace intact. Until recently this house had been covered with stucco and had a full length front porch.
3. Springhouse: Banked stone cabin 1.5 stories, tin roof, datestone J. G. 1847. Half basement where spring channel existed now cemented. First floor room has built-in wall cabinet, walk-in fireplace at south end, rounded window reveals. Second floor had smokehouse room and attic. Walled spring is located to the east of the basement; formerly ran through cabin, now is piped to stream.
4. Barn: Stone bank barn, built 1806, louvered windows at gable ends, tin roof. Upper level is four bays wide with two threshing floors, and is intact. Front facade has closed forebay design with peiler eck. Dutch doors with wrought iron strap hinges, small windows with wooden grills. Stone rear end addition beside ramp extending toward road, gable roof of slate, 1839 datestone. Lower level was used for cattle. The Gehmans converted the eastern half into a cow stable in the 1930s, with concrete floor, cleaning gutters, and metal stanchions. The west half was used as a stable with box stalls added in the 1940s. One-story 1940's addition at east end, built of concrete block, includes former milk house and former chicken house.
5. Stable: Stone 1.5 story building, possibly an early stable, with small louvered windows. Board partitions and knee wall on second floor. Converted to garage with entrance at west gable end.
6. Wagon shed: Stone side walls, one story, hewn beams, upper gable frame with vertical board siding, gable roof. This is a drive-through wagon shed, open at both ends.
7. Privy: Frame with board siding and shed roof.
8. Fences: Post and rail, and worm fences - some new, some old.

The buildings on this farm appear to represent the period of ownership of two generations, the Reverend John Gehman and John S. Gehman from 1767 to 1830. All major buildings as well as the pattern of fields, lanes and woodlots seem to fit this period of development. Of particular note are the house, built by Rev. John c.1767- 1780, and the barn built by John S. in 1806.

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The Swiss Bankhouse type is actually a multi-purpose domestic building that provides for many functions in one building, such as cooking, washing and domestic chores on the lowest level, living area above, and sleeping chambers and grain storage on higher levels. Often exterior entrances are found at two or more elevations. In this example the stone basement is excavated into a steep bank so that it can be entered at grade level at the north end, and by cellar stairs at the south end. The basement level contains a large kitchen the full width of the house at the north end. It has a walk-in fireplace with a bee-hive oven opening in a back corner. It also has a large stone arched foundation support for the upstairs fireplace and chimney. To the rear are several storage rooms and the stairway to the first floor. One of the unique features of this room is its open beam ceiling composed of hewn logs similar set only three or four inches apart. The interstices seem to be filled with stones and clay. Why such a massive support system was built for the floor above is a mystery. The first floor is entered from the east side and originally had a four room plan with no hall. The north east room has a large walk-in fireplace above the kitchen fireplace, while the southwest room has a corner fireplace at the outside corner. The house has wide board floors, open beam ceilings, and several original small built-in wall cabinets with paneled doors and original hardware. An enclosed winder stairway is located between the two back rooms. The upper level is the log portion, which consists of four rooms, and above that is the attic. In the 1970s the current owner built a one floor log addition, connected to the main house by a passageway from the back doorway of the first floor. The addition is built parallel to the house, offset to the north. Its use of compatible materials, and its separation from the house give it the aspect of a distinct entity that does not lessen the architectural significance of the original structure.

The barn built by John S. Gehman is one of the earliest examples of its type in the county. It is classified by Ensminger as a standard Pennsylvania barn, a banked barn with forebay, having a symmetrical gable wall configuration. This barn has stone walls with louvered window openings on its gables. Its interior framing features principal rafters and staggered purlins. The fact that it is a dated example aids researchers like Dr. Ensminger in determining the evolution of barn forms in Berks and other Pennsylvania counties. Its additions, in 1839 and c.1940 are typical changes to increase storage capacity and accommodate new patterns of use. These changes do not disturb the integrity of the original structure.

The two principal agricultural outbuildings, a stable and a wagon shed, both constructed of stone, are considered rare early examples.

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contemporary with the other buildings, c.1800-1830. The stable building has small louvered windows and a Dutch door. It has an interior stairway to a nicely finished two-room loft with knee wall. The stone wagon shed has a wood-sided upper gable with an exterior door for grain or hay storage. It is one of several such wagon sheds observed in the county survey. Commonly wagon sheds are built of wood with corncribs at the sides.

The second stone house was built about 1810 by John S. Gehman. It is a plain featured house, not as architecturally distinctive as the earlier house. Whether Gehman built this new house for his own use is uncertain. The stone cabin/spring house is the other major building. It has a datestone in its upper gable, J G 1847. Its form suggests an earlier building, although it could have been a tenant house built over the spring by John Gehman.

Modern farming methods have not had a great impact on this property. Although it has been a working farm which supported families from 1767 to 1945, since then it has been used as a summer home and country residence. Its fields rented to a tenant farmer without undergoing changes in size or installing soil conservation improvements. The fields and wooded areas are closer to the 19th century plan than on most Berks farms. The fact that this farm consists principally of Chester soils with a moderate to steep slope probably accounts for the fact that its owners have not attempted to farm it intensively. One use has certainly changed. During the early 1800s, John S. Gehman grew apples and was a large manufacturer of applejack. These fields could have supported orchards and probably that was the principle land use for a considerable period.

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

Period of Significance

1767 to 1940

Significant Dates

c. 1767

1806

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

SIGNIFICANCE

The John Gehman farm is significant in the areas of agriculture and architecture under Criteria A and C. Its period of significance spans the time of ownership of the Reverend Johannes Gehman, his son John S., and subsequent generations of family owners from 1767 to 1940. Its land and buildings characterize its use for production of crops, raising of livestock and providing housing and domestic activities for one or more families throughout this period. The buildings are outstanding examples of farm architecture from c.1767 to c.1840. The land still retains its 19th century pattern of small fields, meadow and woodlots, divided by fencerows and rail fences. The remarkable integrity of buildings, land and historic setting give this farm the feeling of an early nineteenth century hill farm. Traces of eighteenth century ethnic building style can be observed in a rare example of a "Swiss Bankhouse", the only one of its kind in Berks County. The structurally intact "standard Pennsylvania banked forebay barn," built 1806 is one of the earliest of its type that has been dated. This property has no intrusive elements, as the changes and additions that have been made through the years respect the original architectural and design qualities.

The farm is associated principally with the Gehman family of Berks County. Three Gehman brothers emigrated from their home in the Palatinate on the Rhine River, landing in Philadelphia in 1732. About 1737 one of the brothers, Christopher, settled in Hereford Township, Berks County, becoming the owner of 300 acres of land. Reverend John Gehman, a Mennonite minister, was the second son of Christopher. In 1767 he purchased a tract of land in Hereford from Andrew Maurer. It was probably John who built the Swiss Bank House on the property. In 1802 the farm passed to the next generation, John S. Gehman. He was probably

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the builder of the large Pennsylvania barn, the stone farmhouse, the stable, stone wagonshed, and cabin/springhouse. A weathered wooden date board on the barn clearly indicates his name and date: John S. Gehman, built 1806. Mr. Gehman was a lifelong farmer and distiller. He produced much applejack which he hauled in barrels in big Conestoga wagons to Philadelphia, where he received twenty-five cents a gallon. The distillery on his farm was one of the first in this part of the state, built before the Revolution. The current owner says the distillery site was adjacent to the north end of the bankhouse, where the stone patio is now located. It is possible that the basement level of the house was used in this enterprise.

After John's death in 1869, his son Joel M. Gehman took over the farm which became his lifetime occupation. Following Joel were two more generations of John Gehmans. In 1945 the farm was purchased by Mrs. Kathleen Seagraves who used the log house as a summer home, while the John and Lydia Gehman family occupied the stone farmhouse. In 1960 the farm was sold to its current owners, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Hoffman, who have used it as their residence. These owners have kept the buildings in repair and have rented out the fields to a tenant farmer, and have kept a flock of sheep. For the last five years when the land has not been cultivated, but the fields have been mowed.

This farm is in the center of a larger tract associated with the Gehman family in Hereford Township. It is an example of an early nineteenth century hill farm of eastern Berks, one that was not as fertile or easily tillable as the valley farms, but one that could provide its owner with a subsistence style of living. According to historian Morton Montgomery, the farm also supported an active distillery. This farm is unique in its buildings and setting, one of many exceptional farms that help portray the history of agriculture in Berks County.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Berks County Conservancy Agricultural Survey and Multiple Property nomination:
"Agriculture in Berks County 1700-1945," 1991

Hoffman, Erwin, owner. Interview 1991

Montgomery, Morton. Historical and Biographical Anuals of Berks County, Pennsylvania
(Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1909), p. 1039.

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

Berks County Conservancy

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 87 acres

UTM References

A	18	450590	4479925
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B	18	450680	4479400
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	18	450100	4479360
	Zone	Easting	Northing

D	18	450110	4480320
	Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Phoebe Hopkins, Administrative Director
 organization Berks County Conservancy date June 1991
 street & number 960 Old Mill Road telephone (215) 372-4992
 city or town Wyomissing state PA zip code 19610

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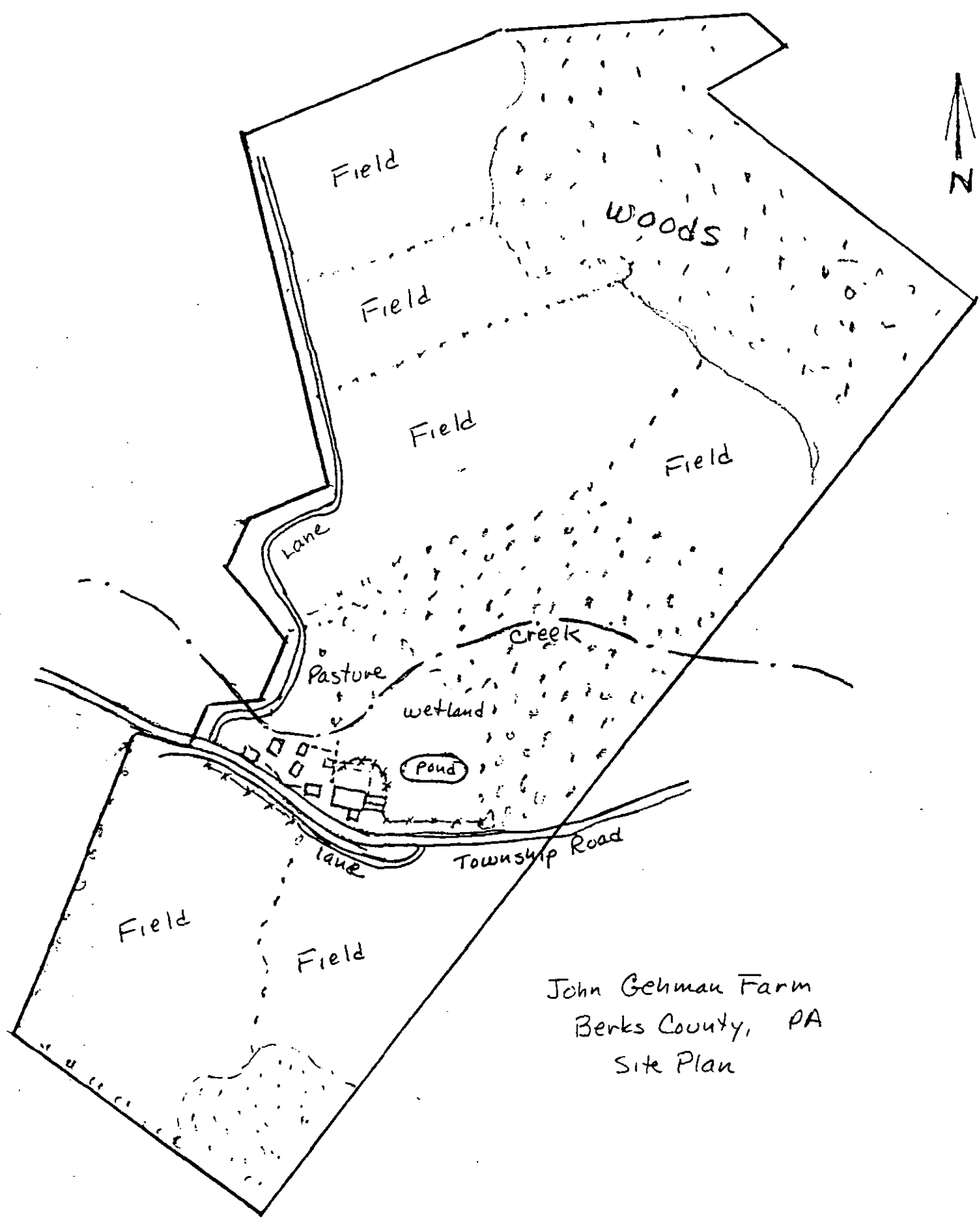
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

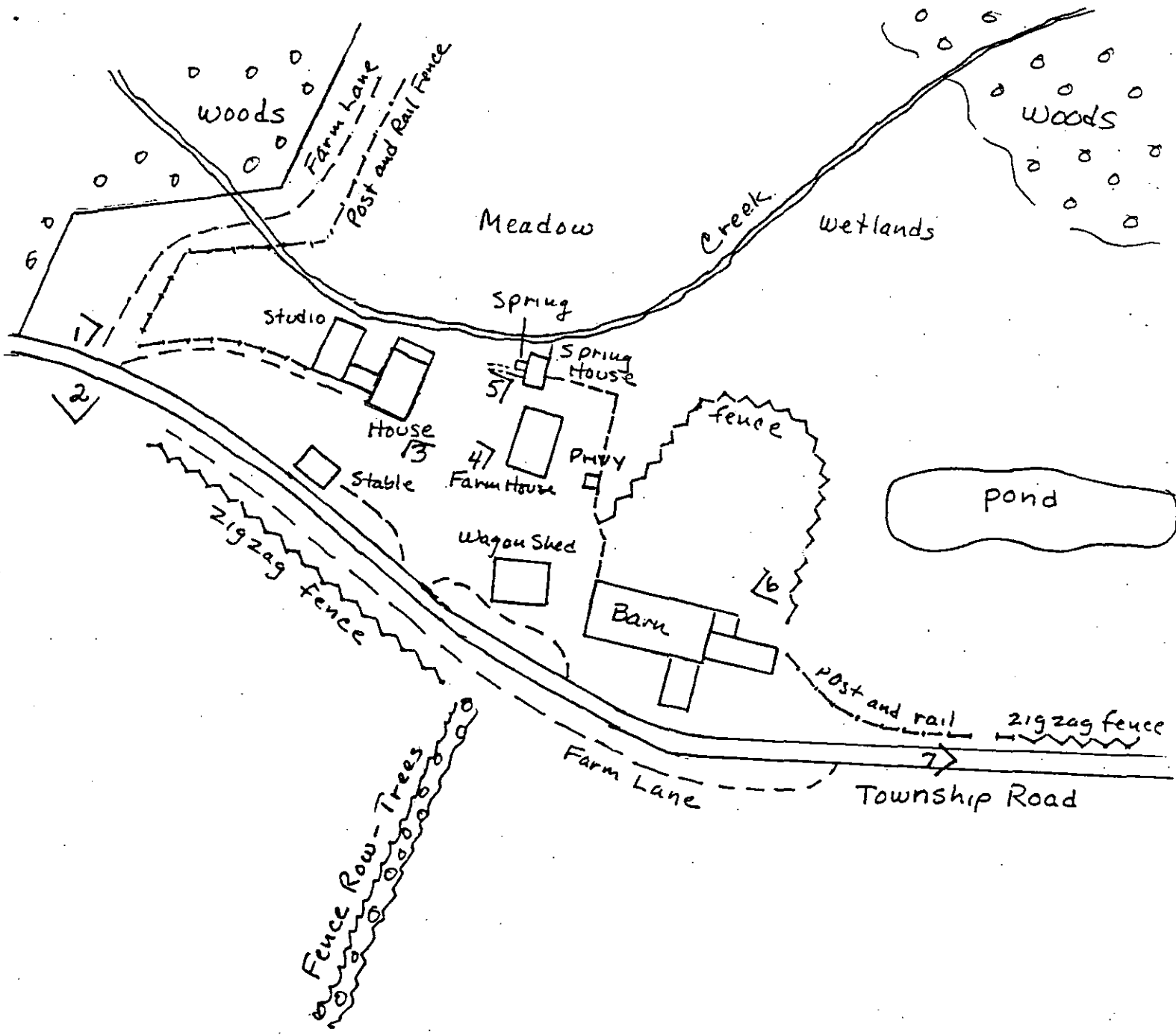
The boundary of the nominated property is the same as the farm boundary. It is marked by fencerows around fields and partially by walls or fences in the wooded sections. The boundary description is found in Berks County Deed Book 1385, page 650, dated April 4, 1961.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The present boundary of the farm was historically associated with this property and the Gehman family. It includes the buildings and landscape features representative of a nineteenth century hill farm. The whole farm qualifies for the National Register under the criteria set forth in this nomination.



John Gehman Farm
Berks County, PA
Site Plan



John Gehman Farm, Berks County, PA
 Farmstead Plan and Photo Views

Behman, John Farm
Berks County
E. Green Hill Quad
Zone 18

A 450110 4480320
B 450080 4477720
C 450100 44779320
D 450110 4480320

