

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

|   |  |  |                                  |
|---|--|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. STATE<br><b>Pennsylvania</b>   |  | 2. THEME(S). IF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE, WRITE "ARCH" BEFORE THEME NO.<br><b>Agriculture/Conservation</b> |                                  |
| 3. NAME(S) OF SITE<br><b>Honey Hollow Watershed Conservation Project</b>  |  |  | 4. APPROX. ACREAGE<br><b>650</b> |
| 5. EXACT LOCATION (County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet)<br><b>Solebury Township, Bucks Co., Pa. (see supplementary sheet, Appendix D)</b>                       |  |  |                                  |
| 6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (Also administrator if different from owner) <b>all R.D. #1, New Hope, Pa.</b><br><b>Forrest Crooks, Francis Fitting, Walter Philips, William Taylor, Charles Wendig</b> |  |  |                                  |
| 7. IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant)  |  |  |                                  |

The Honey Hollow Watershed Conservation Area was the first small upland watershed in agricultural use and multiple private ownership to demonstrate that cooperative local action, supported by Federal technical assistance, was a practicable method of achieving national goals in soil, water and wildlife conservation and flood prevention. As such, it served as a prototype for thousands of similar small watersheds throughout the Nation. In the years since work on it was started in 1939, it significantly advanced popular acceptance at local, state and national levels of soil and water conservation districts. Today, it remains a model of modern soil and water conservation.

The Honey Hollow Watershed consists of five farms totaling about 650 acres, plus part of a farm lying mostly outside the watershed.<sup>1</sup> It is located in the rolling uplands west of the Delaware River, a few miles upstream from New Hope, Pennsylvania. Its fields have been farmed continuously from very early in the 18th Century. William Penn made the original grant to John Scarborough, a London blacksmith, in 1682; and Scarborough's son, John, Jr. first settled on the tract about 1705. Part of the watershed, the present Francis Fitting farm, dates back to an adjoining tract sold to William Beakes by William Penn about the same time.<sup>2</sup>

1. This farm is owned by an investment company reportedly sympathetic to the preservation of the Honey Hollow Watershed.
2. See map and aerial photo in Alston Waring's, "Honey Hollow Watershed," 1968, App. A

8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works)

**Century of Service:** The first 100 years of the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture (U. S. Dept. of Agric., Washington, 1963), pp. 194-199; **Six Farmers on an Upland Stream** (Washington, U. S. Dept. of Agric., Soil Conservation Service, 1942), Foreword.

9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, IABS, etc.)

**"Statement on Historical Significance of the Honey Hollow Watershed,"** by Lloyd E. Partain, Soil Conservation Service, November 7, 1968; **"Honey Hollow Watershed,"** a summary history by P. Alston Waring, October 1968.

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| 10. PHOTOGRAPHS*<br>ATTACHED: YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>   | 11. CONDITION<br><b>Excellent</b>                                | 12. PRESENT USE (Museum, farm, etc.)<br><b>Farming</b> | 13. DATE OF VISIT <b>1968</b><br><b>9/18; 10/15; 10/29</b> |
| 14. NAME OF RECORDER (Signature)<br><br><b>Murray H. Nelligan</b> | 15. TITLE <b>Asst. to R.D. (NERO),<br/>Historic Preservation</b> | 16. DATE<br><b>11/21/68</b>                            |  |

\* DRY MOUNT ON AN 8" X 10" SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. GIVE LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

(IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER)

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SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

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6. Description and Importance (cont'd)...

Most of the stone structures built at that early period survive today. Typically, the farmhouses were added onto over the years. The original section of the present Forrest Crooks' house was built in 1747. The larger, newer section of the Walter Philips house has a date stone of 1755; the undated, small section appears to be considerably older. The farmhouse on the Francis Fitting farm is also of about the same age. A masonry creamery (now used as a dwelling), a carriage house, and a stone bridge and several associated barns are of the same period. Tests on large sycamores obviously planted to shade the present Philips house revealed that they also date from the 18th Century. Built of field stone in the Pennsylvania tradition, all of the masonry structures are simple in design and construction, yet have an air of substantial, sturdy elegance.

The history of the watershed in regard to conservation began in the 1930's, when the owners of the farms along Honey Creek observed with dismay how their fields were washing away. Cultivation by machinery had come into vogue about World War I, and had caused serious sheet and gully erosion on the upland farms, siltation on those downslope. It was obvious that erosion must be checked, or else the land would inevitably be ruined for continued agricultural use.

The Honey Hollow farmers were by no means the only ones with this problem. Throughout the entire country thousands of other farmers were seeing their fields wash away, and for much the same reasons--the methods of cultivation associated with use of agricultural machinery introduced around World War I. Sheet and gully erosion, silting and spoiling of down stream lands; all were serious indicators that soil erosion, unless checked soon, would eventually spoil enormous amounts of farmlands for continued agricultural use.

Actually, the urgency of conserving the soil as a basic resource, and the adverse effect of erosion and soil depletion on the economy had long been recognized by agricultural experts. But it was Dr. Hugh H. Bennett of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, who sounded the call for national action against the menace of soil erosion with the publication of his bulletin on the subject in July 1928. In it, he warned that nations had disappeared from the face of the earth because of soil erosion, pointing out that America had already lost millions of acres of land and that erosion was accelerating on additional millions as the result of large-scale, "square-field" machine cultivation. The process could only be halted, he maintained, by applying combinations of tested soil conservation techniques in over-all, integrated conservation plans, tailored to fit each individual parcel of land.

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6. Description and Importance (cont'd)...

Action on a national scale began in 1933 with relief projects on government lands, but uncertainty as to the legality of using government funds on private property made progress very slow on privately-owned farmlands even though these presented the far greater problem in the opinion of Dr. Bennett. To a great extent, the uncertainty was resolved when the Soil Conservation Service was transferred to the Department of Agriculture in 1935, and emphasis was shifted from the large-scale demonstration projects which had characterized Interior's program to setting up small erosion control districts which could be planned and managed by the farmers themselves. The new approach reflected Secretary Wallace's belief that democracy could succeed only where the mass of the people actively participated in the affairs of government. It was embodied into law in 1937, with organization of soil conservation districts as governmental subdivisions of the State authorized upon the favorable vote of a majority of the "land occupiers" in a proposed district.<sup>3</sup>

It may be assumed that the owners of the farms along Honey Creek followed the progress of this legislation with interest. However, rather than wait for the State to pass enabling legislation and the Act of 1937 to be implemented, they decided to go ahead on their own.<sup>4</sup>

As stated above, the five owners of the farmland in the Honey Hollow watershed had become increasingly concerned about the erosion that was depleting the upland farms and silting over much of the land downslope. Obviously, no individual owner could correct the situation; a combined cooperative effort of all the farmers concerned was required. With no immediate help in sight, they decided to take their problem to the Regional Office of the Soil Conservation Service in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. The response was most gratifying. The Regional Director, Dr. J. P. Jones, agreed to provide the technical assistance needed on condition that the landowners all agree to band together and carry out the soil and water conservation practices prescribed for each tract.

3. The Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law of 1937 was revised later to enable county governments to set up districts.

4. It was well that they did: In due course, when the Act was implemented, the proposed district which included Honey Hollow failed on a referendum.

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6. Description and Importance (cont'd)...

This the owners were glad to do, and planning got underway at once in the Spring of 1939. The different soils in the watershed were analyzed and plotted on a soil distribution map. A comprehensive soil conservation plan for the entire watershed was worked out by the Service and agreed to by the farmers. By the summer, work was underway. Within the next two years, formerly square fields had been converted to plowing on the contour with the furrows going right across former boundaries. Terraces and diversion ditches had been constructed to control runoff on steep slopes. Long dense hedges had been planted to check erosion and provide wildlife habitat. Fertilizers and lime were being put on the fields in accord with the soil development program prescribed by the Soil Conservation Service and sound forestry practices were being followed in the woods that lie in the center of the tract.<sup>5</sup> Several ponds were built and stocked with fish.

Without any great fanfare, yet almost overnight, the "Honey Hollow Project," as it had come to be known, attracted attention from high levels in the Department of Agriculture, as well as from plain farmers seeking ways to improve their lands.

Dr. Hugh H. Bennett, of the Soil Conservation Service, was an especially interested and enthusiastic supporter. On one of his visits to the project, it occurred to him that an illustrated Soil Conservation Service Bulletin on the project would be helpful to other farmers faced with the same problem. Written by P. Alston Waring, one of the Honey Hollow farmers, the book was entitled, Six Farmers on an Upland Stream, when it came out in 1942. After Pearl Harbor it was retitled, Teamwork to Save Soil and Increase Production to key it into the war effort.

Dr. Bennett wrote a foreword for the booklet, which read in part:

We owe these men a debt of gratitude for what they have done--not only for the soil they have protected, but also for showing us that it can be done as they have done it. In spite of many handicaps and with only limited help they have put a good program into effect all over their watershed.

5. These were a carry-over from the original deeds from William Penn which required 1/10 of the land granted to be retained as woodland.

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6. Description and Importance (cont'd)...

This is nearly a unique thing now, but my prediction is it will not be unique for long. After all, this country of ours is made up of a lot of watersheds, and what can be done on one watershed can be done on other watersheds--and will be done.

I am glad Mr. Waring has written this, because what he and his neighbors on Honey Hollow Creek have done deserves to be recorded, and because to my mind it is one of the most inspiring stories that has come across my desk in many months. <sup>6</sup>

Vice President Henry Wallace was also aware of the Honey Hollow project and showed great interest in it. His first visit was in 1944, and afterwards he came there on numerous occasions. Some of his hybrid poultry were field-tested on one of the project's farms. The project was brought to the attention of Congress in 1943 in the form of a report by Dr. Edward H. Graham, Chief of the Biology Division, Soil Conservation Service, to the House Select Committee on Conservation of Wildlife Resources.<sup>7</sup>

Louis Bromfield, novelist and conservationist, was an especially good friend of the project, as was Morris L. Cooke, first Director of the Rural Electrification Administration. Both visited it frequently and often used it to illustrate their conservationist talks.

Between the favorable publicity and national distribution of the booklet, the project became a national model of cooperative farmers' action to conserve natural resources. It popularized the idea that cooperative local effort with government technical help could provide a sound, democratic approach to conservation action. It was a concept of great direct and indirect influence throughout the Nation. Honey Hollow significantly advanced Federal, state and local acceptance of water conservation districts, which now number more than 3,000.

6. A copy of the booklet is attached to the report.
7. Congressional Record, December 10, 1943.

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Condition of the Site

The Honey Hollow Watershed is in excellent condition. All the conservation measures introduced in the late 1930's--terraces, contour-plowed fields, diversion ditches, wildlife hedges, ponds and tree clumps--have been faithfully maintained in accordance with the original plans developed by the Soil Conservation Service in 1939. As dairying has died out for economic reasons in the region, there has been some corresponding shift in crops. One farm, Francis Fitting's, is now in grass; while that of Forrest and Malcolm Crooks has been largely given over to growing Christmas trees and various hollies. Otherwise, the land use pattern is virtually unchanged.

Likewise, all but one of the original farm buildings are extant and in good repair. (A house on the Miller farm burned some years ago.) The old water wheel installed some years ago on the Miller farm continues to pump water from a deep well. Other than the maturing of the trees and shrubs over the years and the fairly recent construction of an additional pond on the Crooks' farm, there has been little change in the historic appearance of the watershed. Even the scar made by construction of a pipe line across the watershed several years back has about healed over. There has been only one change in ownership; the farm formerly owned by P. Alston Waring is now owned by Walter Philips.

Threats to the Integrity of the Area

The basic, underlying threat to the continued existence of the watershed is the rapid growth in population and resultant urbanization of this section of Bucks County. Land values are already so high that farming is dying out simply because farmers cannot afford the high cost of land, with correspondingly high mortgage costs and taxes. Consequently, the lands comprising the watershed could be sold for development at any time and the integrity of this significant conservation area lost.

More immediate threats are the projected four-lane limited access highway (U.S. 202) scheduled to be built across the northern edge of the watershed and a 500 kw. high voltage line the Philadelphia Electric Company plans to construct across the middle of the property. As presently routed, the latter would not only seriously damage the physical integrity of the watershed, more importantly, it would ruin the watershed aesthetically.

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Threats to the Integrity of the Area (cont'd)...

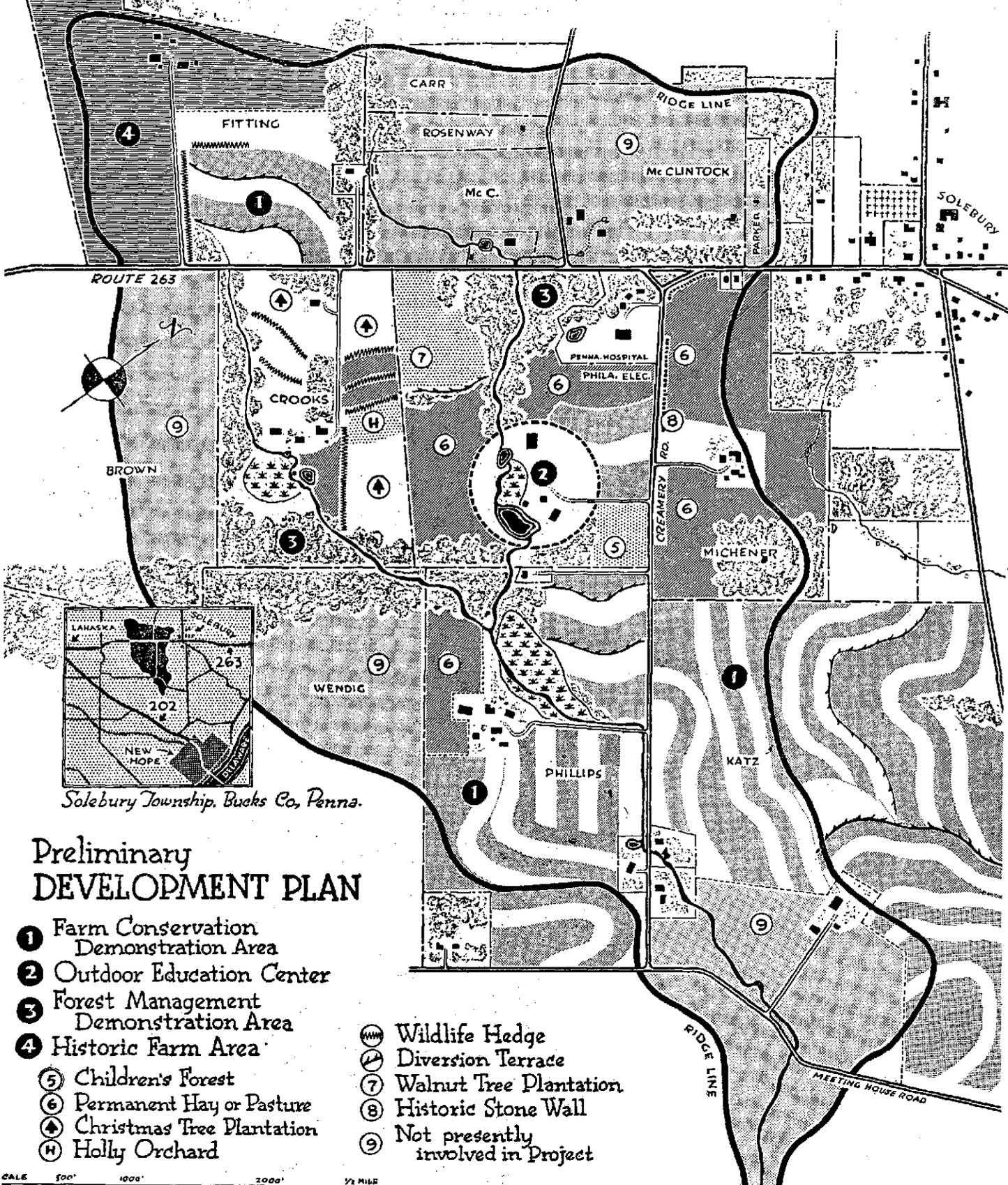
Just as 30 years ago the owners banded together voluntarily to save their farms from soil erosion, today they are making a common effort to find a way to save Honey Hollow from commercial exploitation. To ensure the preservation of the scenic, natural and historic values represented in it for future generations, they have formed the Honey Hollow Watershed Association and are meeting with officials of all levels of government--Solebury Township, Bucks County (Planning Commission and Park Board), the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Department of Forests and Waters, Department of Municipal Services, State Historical and Museum Commission), and the Federal Government (Soil Conservation Service and the National Park Service). Their goal is finding ways by which they can continue to farm their fields, except for a centrally located section which is especially well-suited for a conservation, or environmental study area for school children and the general public. To help focus their thinking, they have obtained preliminary planning assistance from the Pennsylvania State University School of Landscape Architecture.

In addition to the nature center, or environmental study area, the Association is considering a sequence of three living historic farms: one to demonstrate 18th Century farming, another showing 19th Century cultivation, and a third to demonstrate the square-field farming by machinery that caused the erosion damages that prompted the original formation of the watershed project.

The new project, if it succeeds, promises to be as valuable a contribution to the national welfare, in its way, as was the original.

# HONEY HOLLOW WATERSHED

## A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK



Solebury Township, Bucks Co, Penna.

### Preliminary DEVELOPMENT PLAN

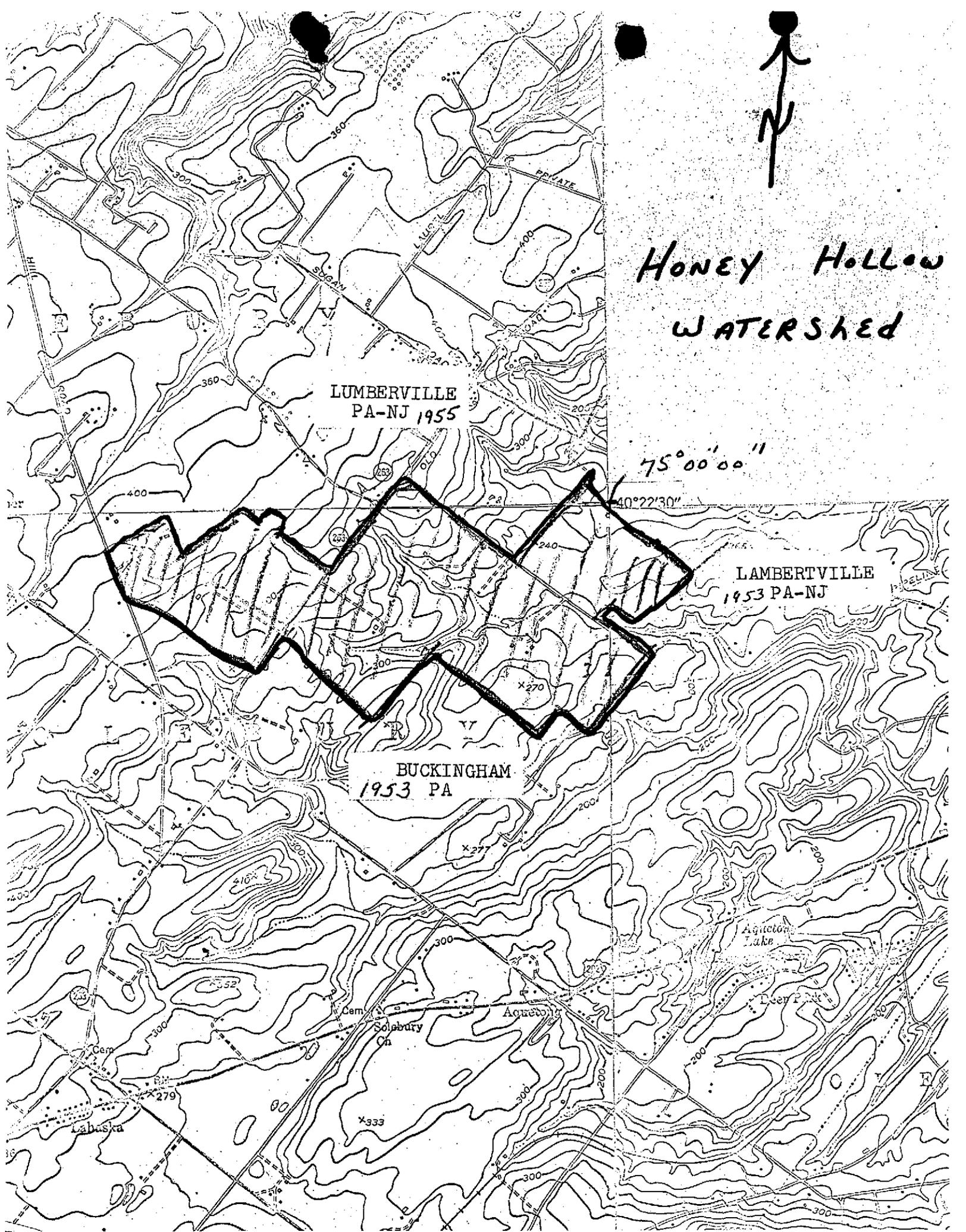
- ① Farm Conservation Demonstration Area
- ② Outdoor Education Center
- ③ Forest Management Demonstration Area
- ④ Historic Farm Area
- ⑤ Children's Forest
- ⑥ Permanent Hay or Pasture
- ④ Christmas Tree Plantation
- ④ Holly Orchard

- ④ Wildlife Hedge
- ④ Diversion Terrace
- ⑦ Walnut Tree Plantation
- ⑧ Historic Stone Wall
- ⑨ Not presently involved in Project

SCALE 500' 1000' 2000' 1/2 MILE



# Honey Hollow WATERSHED



LUMBERTVILLE  
PA-NJ 1955

75°00'00"

40°27'30"

LAMBERTVILLE  
1953 PA-NJ

BUCKINGHAM  
1953 PA

Aqueduct  
Lake

Deer Park

Cem  
Solisbury  
Cn

Acresbury

Labaska

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