

**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 Fonthill, Mercer Museum and Moravian Pottery and Tile Works

and or common

2. Location

Fonthill and Moravian Pottery Court Street and Swamp Road, Doylestown, Pa.
street & number Mercer Museum Pine and Ashland Street, Doylestown, Pa. — not for publication

city, town _____ vicinity of _____

state Pennsylvania code _____ county Bucks County code _____

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input 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 Bucks County Historical Society (Mercer Museum)

street & number Pine and Ashland Streets

city, town Doylestown, Pa. _____ vicinity of _____ state _____

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bucks County Court House, Registry of Deeds

street & number Court House

city, town Doylestown, Pa. _____ state _____

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic American Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1966 _____ federal _____ state _____ county _____ local _____

depository for survey records

city, town Washington, DC 20240 _____ state _____

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

There are three sites associated with Henry Chapman Mercer and although they are not contiguous they should be considered as one site. They consist of his home, Fonhill, his collection now the Mercer Museum and the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works.

Fonhill: Mercer's home was begun in 1907 and most of it was complete by 1912. Mercer wrote in his notebook "the house was planned by me, room by room, entirely from the interior out, the exterior not being considered until all of the rooms had been imagined and sketched, after which blocks of clay representing the rooms were piled on the table, set together and modelled into a general outline. After a good many changes in the profile of the tower, roofs, etc., a plaster of paris model was made to scale, and used until the building was completed".¹

Loosely based on medieval castles Mercer had seen in his travels, Fonhill was "designed" as work proceeded. One of the pioneers in the use of reinforced concrete as a building material, it was durable, reasonably fire-proof and recommended for its pliability when poured. All of the concrete was mixed by hand, the shell being formed first and then embellished with red tile on the roof windows, dormers and chimneys being placed as the structure progressed. A horse, named Lucy, helped haul concrete to be used on the upper walls, roof, etc. A brief description of construction is taken from Dr. Mercer's notebooks; along with formulas for concrete, he mentions using solid iron rods for reinforcement - the smaller irons are hollow 3/4 inch iron pipes bought in junk yards. The house walls are two feet thick. Windows were pre-cast in cross-shaped sections bound together with cement mortar after the glass was fitted. The plan is irregular, approximately 100 feet x 50 feet, with 2 1/2- and 3 1/2 story sections. There is a 4 story tower with raised basement and with steeply pitched hip, gable and pyramidal roofs.

Fonhill was meant to be a museum exhibiting Mercer's extensive collection of ceramic tiles, his rich collection of prints, tapestries, and magnificent books on a wide variety of subjects.

Also part of Fonhill, is a garage cast in concrete with a large second story balcony with many chimney pots which are dove cotes. There is a spring house decorated with tiles, cement gates to the estate, and several arched cement bridges over a stream. The property has remained unchanged since the 1930s. Mercer willed the house to the public as a museum of tiles, engravings and woodcuts.

The Mercer Museum

Mercer's pursuit of archaeology and anthropology led to his interest in pre-industrial tools and artifacts. His collection of "Tools of the Nation Maker" is the most comprehensive of its type in the world. The large museum,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2

constructed of concrete, from the inside out, stands on the grounds of the Bucks County Historical Society. There were no plans or drawings; workmen just followed his directions. One of the first buildings totally constructed in reinforced concrete, the museum, although larger than his house (Fonthill) resembles it in form and detail.

The building has a medieval flavor, with towers, chimney dove cotes, turrets, etc. All floors housing this remarkable collection are of concrete, as well as the windows and roof. The museum is 115 feet high and is 97 feet by 71 feet. It contains 297 windows varying from 1 1/2 feet square to 10 to 15 feet square with rounded heads. The interior is an open well from floor to ceiling with a ramp that begins at ground level and leads to a balcony that runs continuously past 40 alcoves filled with tools of forty crafts and trades. There are over 30,000 artifacts including hand tools and machines. The building was dedicated on June 17, 1916.

The other buildings on this site are a neo-Georgian building designed for the Bucks County Historical Society by Horace Trumbauer in 1904. In addition, there is a furnished log cabin originally built in Doylestown (ca 1799) and moved to the museum site in 1911. Two carriage sheds originally at the Abington Friends Meeting were re-installed in 1969 and now house a carriage collection: the newest addition to the complex is the Library wing, designed by A. Oscar Martin in 1933-1936 to compliment Mercer's original concrete structure.

Moravian Pottery and Tile Works

The tile works, a short distance away is a "U" shaped building constructed around an open courtyard. Built of reinforced concrete with concrete buttresses, approximately 120 feet by 100 feet with arcaded court, it resembles a medieval cloister. The factory is 2 1/2 stories built in tiers with towers. The gable roofs have rounded ridges of brushed concrete with steep parapets at the gable ends. The roof is a concave hip roof covered with tiles. Irregular chimneys and windows with variety of decorative tiles are set in both exterior and interior walls. There are concrete groin and barrel-vaulted interiors housing five pottery kilns. This structure replaces an earlier pottery works that burned.

The present structure, built in 1911-1912, still functions as a manufactory of mostly architectural tile.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1907 - 1916

Builder/Architect

Henry C. Mercer

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Today, Henry Chapman Mercer (1856-1930) is regarded as a scholar who collected and preserved early American artifacts and tools, as a designer of arts and crafts ceramics and tiles, and especially as a visionary architect who was one of the first designers to work with reinforced concrete as a building material - a kind of primitive American Antonio Gaudi.

Mercer was part of that era in the 1880s and 1890s when the English Arts and Crafts movement influenced American ceramic craftsmen such as at Rookwood Pottery, American Encaustic Tiling Company, the Low Art Tile Works, and the Grueby Faience Company. It was the Centennial Exposition of 1876 that created an interest in art-industries. By the mid-1890s, tile manufacture had become a thriving American industry.

At just about this time, Mercer, an archaeologist on the staff of the University Museum in Philadelphia, decided to abandon his academic career and establish his own pottery and tileworks in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The story of the success of the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works, as Mercer called his establishment, is quite unlike that of most other American potteries. Its founder was not an artist nor a trained ceramist. Instead, Mercer was a scholar with a wide range of interests and a sound sense of business and showmanship.

The distinctive tiles he designed and manufactured brought him world-wide fame and, as a result, a substantial fortune. With these financial resources, in addition to family money, Mercer designed and built three innovative structures of reinforced concrete: a castlelike residence for himself, a pottery and tileworks, and a museum. In addition, he became one of America's earliest and most important collectors of tools, folk art, iron stove plates, agricultural implements, rare books, manuscripts, prints, folk music, and tiles. Today the Mercer legacy is only beginning to be appreciated at all levels of scholarly inquiry.

"Although Mercer had a highly developed antiquarian interest long before he went into the tilemaking business, the impetus to actually establish a factory appears to have originated with his desire to preserve an abandoned Bucks County pottery."²

Apparently, it was Mercer's interest in hand crafts that led him to try to resuscitate on old local pottery. It was appropriate that architects were again using fireplaces on the house interior which created a demand for ornamental tiles.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination FormFor NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

"The name Moravian Pottery and Tile Works were appropriately chosen for this eastern Pennsylvania business which was to specialize in handcrafted tiles. Long an admirer of the folk art of the early Pennsylvania German settlers, Mercer turned to their decorated cast-iron stove plates for his first tile designs. Even more important, however, he adapted the technique of molding decorative cast iron to Bucks County clay, thereby making it possible to produce decorative fireplace, wall, and floor tiles that were beautiful, unusual, and geared for a very discriminating American market. He consciously sought to achieve a rough, handcrafted effect in all of his tiles".³

In 1904, Mercer was awarded the grand prize for his tiles at the St. Louis Exposition.

"Recent research in the extensive records of the tileworks has revealed that Mercer tiles were used extensively in houses, churches, libraries, schools and colleges, and hotels throughout the United States and abroad. Buildings in which Mercer tiles were installed include Grauman's Chinese Theater in Hollywood, California; the Casino at Monte Carlo; the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; the recently demolished Traymore Hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey; the library of Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania; and the state capitol in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania."⁴

In 1910, Mercer began his own house, Fonthill, one of the three reinforced concrete buildings that he erected in Doylestown. Fonthill was also a museum of a collection of magnificent tiles from all over the world. Again, his interest in history and anthropology drove him to make vast collections of tools, machines instruments, horse-drawn vehicles and folk art. The museum was to explain "the history of our country from the work of human hands".

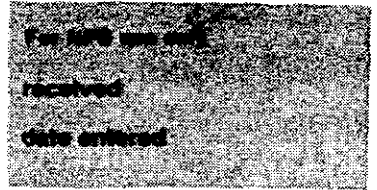
Mercer also wrote extensively: Ancient Carpenter's Tools, the Bible in Iron and his well known, The Dating of Old Houses were a few of his publications.

When Henry Mercer died in March, 1930 he willed Fonthill with an endowment to the public, to be run as a museum. The Tile works was left to a colleague, closed after his death and is now re-opened and maintained by the Bucks County Department of Parks. The museum with its library are an invaluable resource to scholars and museologists.

Henry Mercer had spent a lifetime acquiring and disseminating knowledge of the arts and crafts and his legacy is a very rich one for students of folk life in America.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

Footnotes

1. Mercer, Henry C. Notebooks. Unpublished manuscript in the Bucks County Historical Society.
2. Antiques. Vol CIV. Number 4, October 1973, p. 678.
3. Ibid., p. 680.
4. Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 1

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Doylestown: Bucks County Historical Society. 1960. Pamphlet.

Stefano, Albert B. D., Jr. Research report presented at Millersville State
College. January 1969.

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1966.

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Architectural Record. Vol XXXVI, Number 5. November 1914. pp. 421-430.

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The Craftsman Vol 12, 1907. pp. 549-551.

Pilling, Donald W. Henry Chapman Mercer and the Moravian Tile Works.

American Art and Antiques Vol 2, Issue 6. December 1979. pp. 79-83.

Mercer, Henry C. Notebooks and Diaries, Bucks County Historical Society. 1932,
p. 321-330.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
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date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

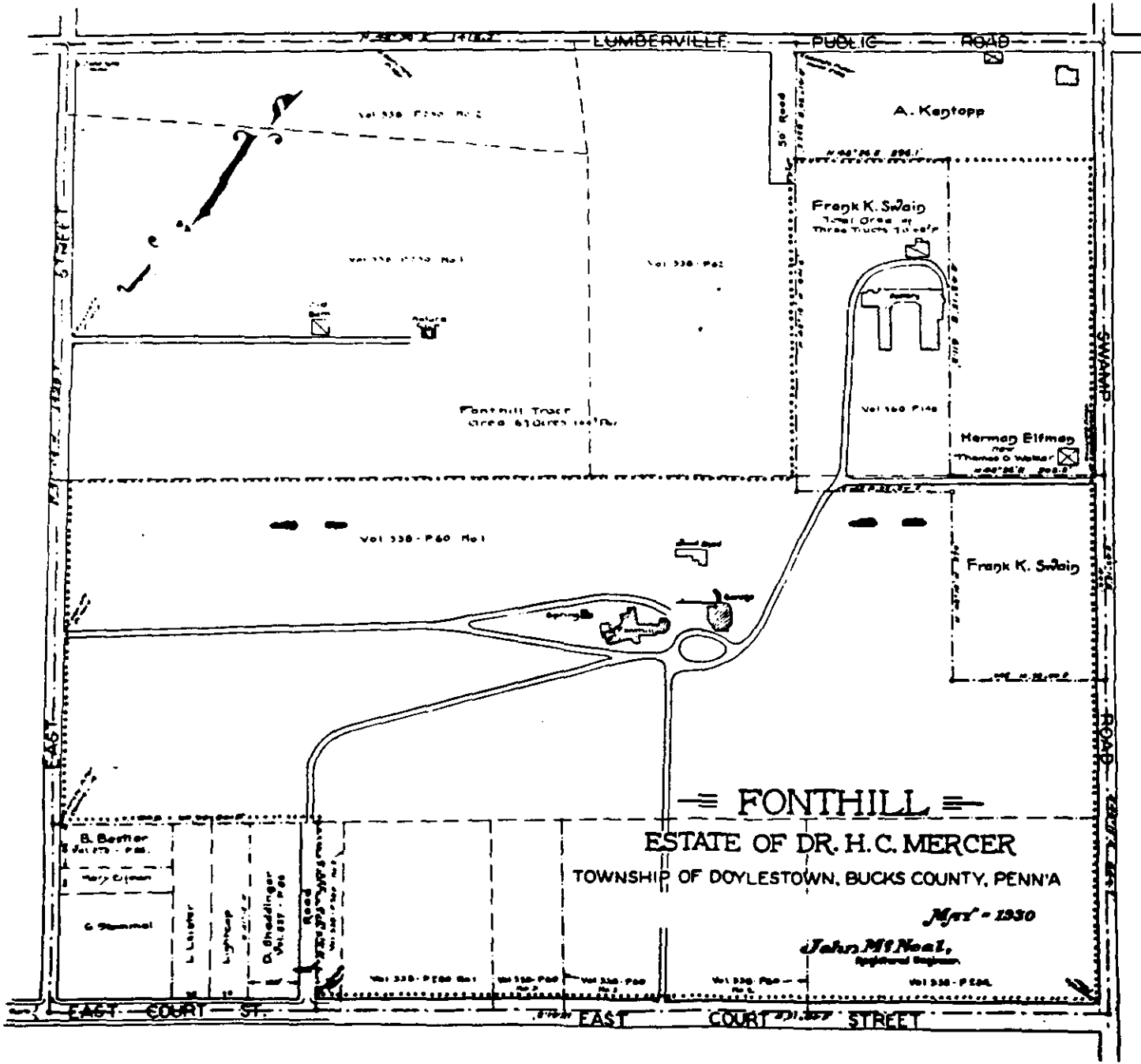
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Mercer Museum

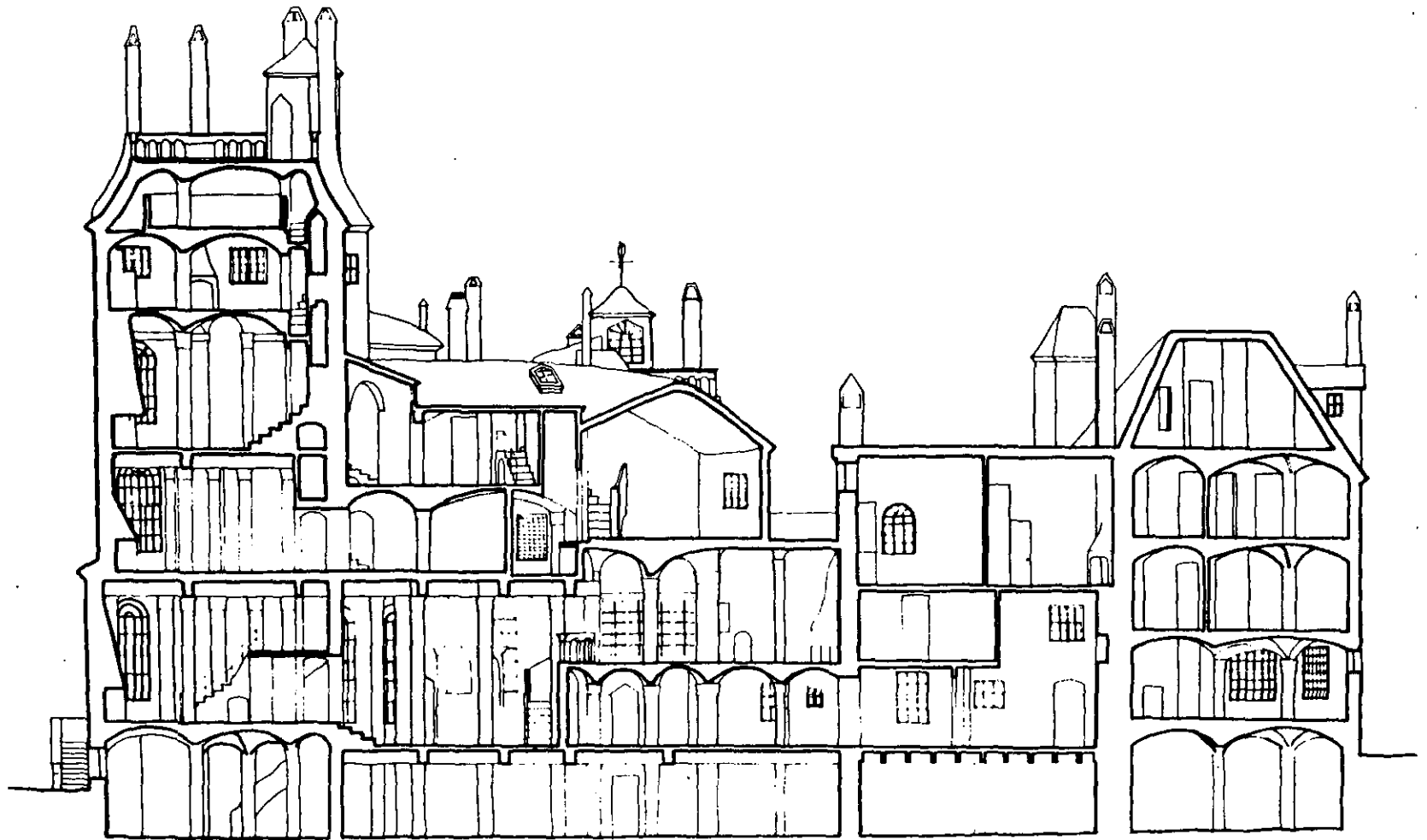
All property bounded by Pine Street, Ashland Street, Green Street and Scout Way in Doylestown Borough. All property owned by the Bucks County Historical Society.

Fonthill and Tile Factory

West on East Court Street to access road, (concrete pillar), North to Estate Road, West to East Street, north on East Street to the Fonthill Tract, as defined on 1930 site map attached, east along lot line to Tile Factory lot line, north to access road, east to Swamp Road and south to East Court Street. This includes the two Swain lots, one Elfman lot and access road which belong to the County of Bucks, Pennsylvania.



..... Proposed Fonthill/Tileworks NATIONAL Landmark District

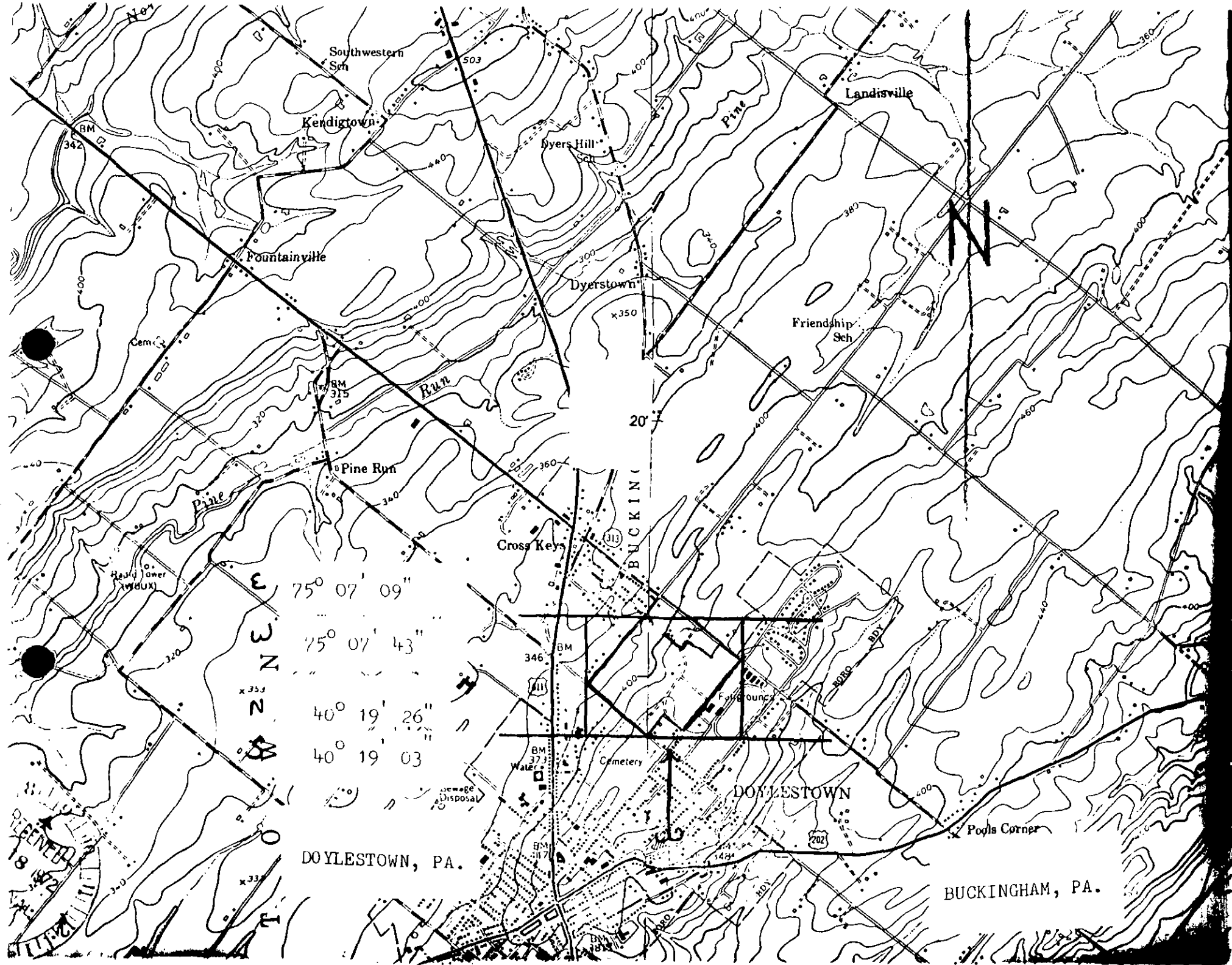


0' 10' 20'

FIG. 11 LONGITUDINAL SECTION

Fonthill Elevation
Bucks Co. Historical Society

001675



75° 07' 09"
75° 07' 43"
40° 19' 26"
40° 19' 03"

DOYLESTOWN, PA.

BUCKINGHAM, PA.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property _____
Quadrangle name Buckingham and Doylestown, Pa.

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>8</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>3</u> <u>2</u> <u>6</u> <u>0</u>	B	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>4</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>2</u> <u>7</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u> <u>6</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>3</u> <u>1</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u>	D	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>
E	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>2</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>	F	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
G	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	H	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>

(Mercer
Museum)

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Pitts, Arch. Historian

organization History Division NPS date August 10, 1984

street & number 1100 L Street, N.W. telephone 343-8166

city or town Washington, DC state _____

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 _____ date _____

title _____

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