

THEME: The Contemplative Society,  
Painting, and Sculpture

STATE: <b>Pennsylvania</b>
COUNTY: <b>Delaware</b>
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**  
(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
**Benjamin West Birthplace**

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**Benjamin West Birthplace**

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Swarthmore College campus**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Swarthmore**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
**Penna. #7**

STATE: **Pennsylvania** CODE: **42** COUNTY: **Delaware** CODE: **45**

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Comments <u>Faculty Residence</u>

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Dr. Theodore Friend, President, Swarthmore College**

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Swarthmore**

STATE:  
**Pennsylvania**

CODE:  
**42**

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Friends Historical Library**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Swarthmore College**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Swarthmore**

STATE:  
**Pennsylvania**

CODE:  
**42**

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:

CODE:

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: **Pennsylvania**

COUNTY: **Delaware**

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

(Check One)

Excellent     Good     Fair     Deteriorated     Ruins     Unexposed

(Check One)

Altered     Unaltered

(Check One)

Moved     Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Benjamin West Birthplace is a two-and-a half story stone house, constructed of random ashlar, with a gambrel roof, with two dormers on a side, and two internal gable-end brick chimneys. A one bay pedimented entrance porch extends from the center of the front facade. These features, with the exception of the dormers, appear in an early nineteenth century lithograph of the house. The reported date of construction is 1724. In 1874, the house was gutted by fire, and the present interior dates from the subsequent renovation, leaving the exterior as the sole remainder with historic integrity. On the northern end of the house there is a one story extension that was added after 1874, as was the pent roof that runs around the house at the second floor level. A glassed-in porch on the rear facade also dates from the later period.

The house stands on what is now the Swarthmore College campus and is used as a faculty residence. It faces across a parking lot and Chester Road onto an open green, while the other three sides look on the grounds and buildings of the college.

Boundary

Beginning at the intersection of the curb of the entrance road and the western edge of the parking lot, proceed North approximately 170' to the NW corner of the parking lot, thence NW in a straight line to the circular footpath extending from Worth Hall to the entrance road, thence South following the line of said path to the curb of the entrance road, thence East along the curb to the point or origin. These boundaries enclose the house and those contingent grounds that are in primarily domestic use while excluding the buildings and facilities that are primarily in college use.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1738-1753**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry		_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature		_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Music	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Benjamin West, born in 1738 in Springfield, (now Swarthmore) Pennsylvania, is not remembered today so much for the artistic skills and innovations that made him famous in both England and America in his day, but for the help and encouragement he gave so freely to the young American artists who sought him out in England. His protégés included Gilbert Stuart, Charles Willson Peale, John Trumbull, and Thomas Sully, to name a few. By the age of 18, West had established himself as a portrait painter in Philadelphia, and three years later he was able to go to Europe to study. By 1763, he was in England, where he achieved considerable success, and was awarded a royal grant of £ 1,000 a year from George III. West continued to live in England until his death in 1820. The Benjamin West birthplace, a two and a half story stone house dating from 1724, was gutted by fire in 1874, and the interior dates from the subsequent restoration. The house is presently owned by Swarthmore College, and is used as a faculty residence.

Biography

West was born the youngest of ten children in the family of John and Sara West, he an English Quaker who emigrated to America in 1714, and she the daughter of a companion of William Penn in his voyage to the New World. Benjamin himself never became a Quaker, but brought up his two sons in the Anglican communion.

From his early youth West demonstrated both the interest and the skills of a budding artist, and he was encouraged in his pursuit by several persons impressed by his enthusiasm. At the age of fifteen he garnered his first commission as a portrait painter. Not long after this, he left his home in Springfield and moved to Philadelphia, where he attended the College of Philadelphia for a short time in 1756. West, however, was eager to study abroad, and by taking what commissions he could, including inn signs as well as portraits, he was able to sail for Italy from New York in 1760.

West was very well received in Italy, being perhaps the first American to study there, and accompanied by letters of introduction to high society, as well as his good looks and charm. He visited Florence, Rome, and the other centers of Italian art, studying the masters, especially Raphael and Titian, while his own work was being favorably judged, especially for its colors. In 1763, the artist sailed to England, planning on a brief stay which stretched into a lifetime stay of fifty-seven years. (continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Samuel Green, American Art, A Historical Survey, New York, 1966.

Mantle Fielding, "Benjamin West," Dictionary of American Biography, New York, 1943.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES	
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		UTM	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		18,46930.4417060	
NW	° ' "	° ' "			
NE	° ' "	° ' "			
SE	° ' "	° ' "			
SW	° ' "	° ' "			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: .74

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Richard Greenwood, Survey Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

ORGANIZATION: Historic Sites Survey, Landmark Review Project      DATE: 9/25/74

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1100 L Street

CITY OR TOWN: Washington      STATE: D.C.      CODE: 11

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION      NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

<p>As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/>    State <input type="checkbox"/>    Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Title _____</p> <p>(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)</p> <p>Date _____</p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p>(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) Landmark Designated: <u>Dec. 21, 1965</u> Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation      date</p> <p>(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) Boundary Certified: <u>Richard Heinich 6-19-75</u> Date _____      Chief, Hist. &amp; Arch. Surveys      date</p> <p>ATTEST: _____ Boundary Affirmed: <u>Richard Heinich 6/19/75</u> Keeper of The National Register      Date _____ Director, OAHIP      date</p>
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SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

STATE Pennsylvania	
COUNTY Delaware	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

8. Statement of Significance: (1) Benjamin West Birthplace

West repeated his easy entry into the high circles of society in England, at a time when English painting, aside from portraiture, was held in low esteem. Thus, West's first products, historical scenes, created a sensation in their departure from the English school. In such a work as "Agrippina Landing at Brindisium With the Ashes of Germanicus," (1768) the linearity and the flatness reflect the influence of the classical bas-reliefs and antique vases that West had studied so assiduously in Italy. These classically-inspired elements have generated such statements as:

"...West developed the stylistic characteristics of neo-classicism nearly twenty years before the first important picture in the new mode..."<sup>1</sup>

Through the influence of Dr. Robert Drummond, archbishop of York and West's strongest patron, the American was presented to George III, who was another admirer of West's work. In 1769, West produced "The Departure of Regulus from Rome," for his first royal commission, and in 1772 he was appointed historical painter to the king, a position which occupied most of his time and efforts, but compensated him with an annual salary of £ 1,000. Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle were the main repositories for the works West produced during this period.

One important picture of this epoch that was a departure for the artist in style was the "Death of Wolfe," produced in 1771. In this work West eschewed the classical motifs in favor of a romantic realism, marked by its baroque lines and emotionalism. The characters are presented in contemporary military dress, rather than classical togas, and the emphasis is on curves and diagonals rather than flatness and linearity.

While holding the king's commission and presiding regularly over the Royal Academy, West enjoyed a security and prestige that he utilized in the patronage and tutelage of young artists, especially Americans. Though not a great master himself, he was well able to provide technical as well as personal assistance to beginners, who included; Copley, Charles Willson and Rembrandt Peale, Matthew Pratt, Thomas Sully, and Gilbert Stuart, among others.

West continued in the service of the king uninterruptedly for more than twenty years. Then, in 1801, he was notified that the work in the chapel at Windsor Castle was to cease. The artist began a series of religious painting for public sale, which included his most commercially successful work, "Christ Healing the Sick." In 1811 the £ 1,000 allowance was discontinued, but the artist made no complaint. The break with the king and the death of his wife in 1814 marked the beginning of a general decline in the health of the artist. He died on March 11, 1820. His body lay in state at the the Royal Academy and he was buried with great honors in St. Paul's Cathedral.

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Green, American Art, A Historical Survey, New York, 1966.

CHESTER ROAD

Towards Penn Central  
Railroad Line →

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE CAMPUS

WORTH HALL

PARKING LOT

170'

LATER  
ADDITION  
Benjamin West  
Birthplace

DRIVEWAY

Entrance Road, Swarthmore College

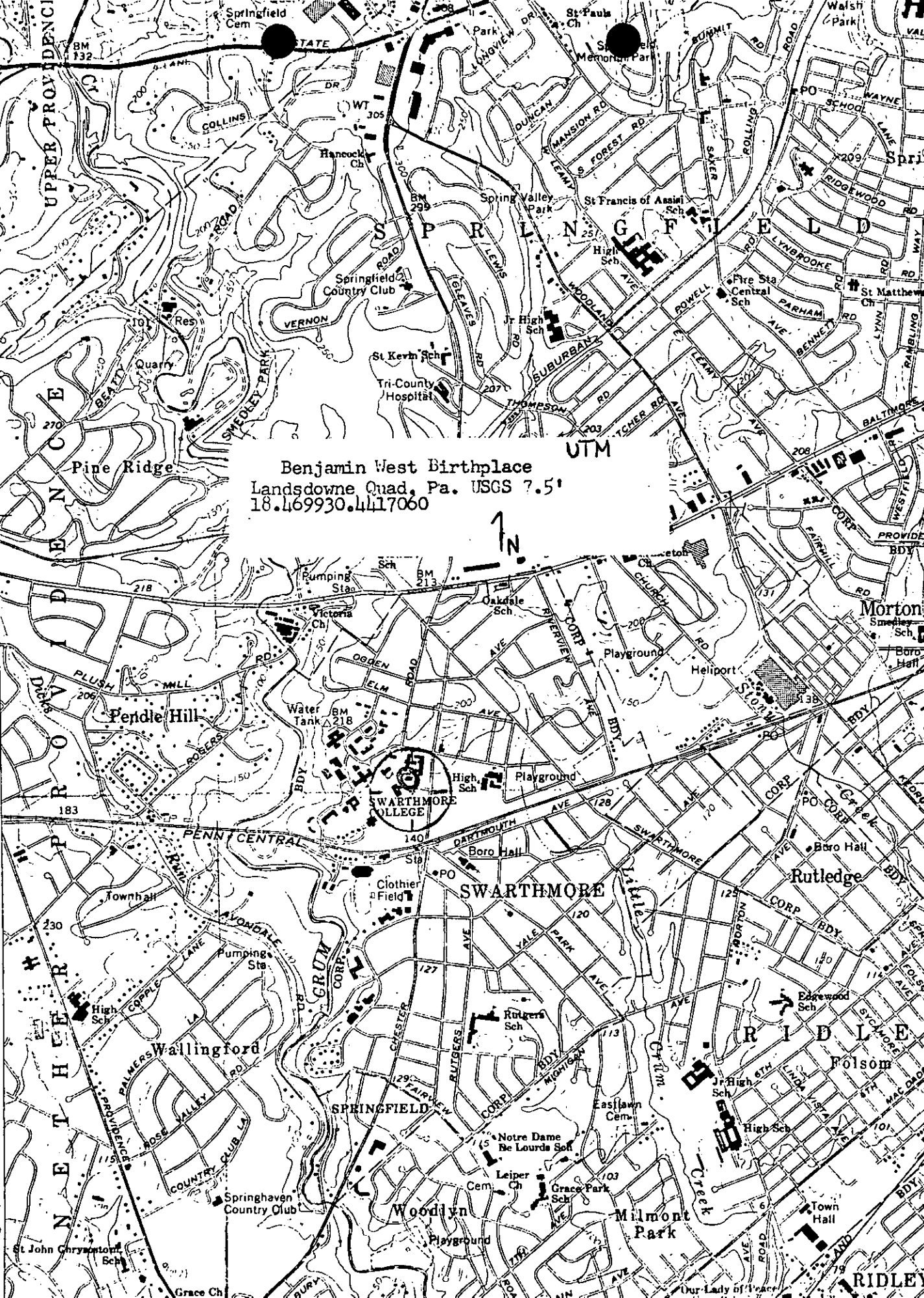


Boundary line, National Historic Landmark

not drawn to scale

5163 14 44 11 (MEDIAL)

419  
55'  
418  
417  
416  
415  
10 000 FEET



Benjamin West Birthplace  
 Landsdowne Quad, Pa. USGS 7.5'  
 18.469930.4417060

UTM

