**DEPOSITORY FOR** 

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

#### NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RECEIVED NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES JAN **16** 1980 **INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM DATE ENTERED** SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS NAME HISTORIC Bomberger's Distillery AND/OR COMMON Michter's Distillery **2 LOCATION** STREET & NUMBER 16 7 mi. SW of Newmanstown off Pa. 501 NOT FOR PUBLICATION CITY, TOWN CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT Newmanstown VICINITY OF CODE COUNTY STATE CODE Pennsylvania 42 075 Lebanon 3 CLASSIFICATION **CATEGORY** OWNERSHIP **STATUS PRESENT USE** DISTRICT \_\_PUBLIC XOCCUPIED \_\_AGRICULTURE \_\_MUSEUM \_XBUILDING(S) XPRIVATE \_UNOCCUPIED \_COMMERCIAL \_PARK \_\_STRUCTURE \_вотн ...WORK IN PROGRESS FDUCATIONAL \_\_PRIVATE RESIDENCE \_\_SITE **PUBLIC ACQUISITION ACCESSIBLE** \_\_ENTERTAINMENT \_\_RELIGIOUS \_\_OBJECT \_IN PROCESS XYES: RESTRICTED \_GOVERNMENT \_\_SCIENTIFIC \_\_\_BEING CONSIDERED \_\_YES: UNRESTRICTED X\_INDUSTRIAL \_\_TRANSPORTATION \_\_\_NO \_\_MILITARY \_OTHER: 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY NAME Michter's Distillery, Inc. (Louis Forman, President) STREET & NUMBER P.O. Box 387 CITY, TOWN STATE Schaefferstown VICINITY OF Pennsylvania LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC Recorder of Deeds Office, Lebanon County Courthouse STREET & NUMBER South Eighth Street CITY, TOWN STATE Pennsylvania Lebanon 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS Historic American Engineering Record; National Register of Historic X\_FEDERAL X\_STATE \_\_COUNTY \_\_LOCAL 1975; 1975

SURVEY RECORDS OF Historic Places

CITY, TOWN

Washington

D.C.

Historic American Engineering Record; National Register



\_GOOD

#### CONDITION

CHECK ONE

CHECK ONE

X_EXCELLENT	
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\_\_DETERIORATE

\_\_UNEXPOSED

\_\_RUINS

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\_\_MOVED DATE\_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Situated in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country and surrounded by lush farms, the Bomberger Distillery continues to utilize locally grown grain and sparkling clean Blue Mountain water to produce a pot still whiskey much like that made by John and Michael Shenk in 1753. Although the distillery has been expanded somewhat over the years, a Still House, Warehouse, and Jug House, all dating from around 1840, continue to be utilized in whiskey production.

Little information has been uncovered about buildings constructed on the distillery property during the Shenk and Meyer periods. When the Shenks began production of whiskey here in 1753, they probably utilized a portion of their gristmill, located on the banks of Snitzel Creek, as a still house or else built a small structure nearby to house their prized pot still. Also, it seems highly likely that Rudolph Meyer either expanded the Shenk era buildings or erected new ones late in the 18th century to house the operations of his three stills and provide storage space for their output.

The most historic extant portions of the present distillery complex were constructed around 1840 by John Kratzer, who operated it from 1827 to his death in 1860. It seems certain that he erected the Still House and Warehouse, and he probably built a portion of the Jug House as well. Recent research indicates that Kratzer may have utilized building materials from earlier edifices on the site in erecting these buildings. Much of the lumber appears to have been reworked, and floor joists found on the first floor of the Still House indicate the footing for earlier rafters. Also, the foundations of the Still House and Warehouse are much older than the structures they support and probably date from the Shenk or Meyer eras.

After the Bombergers purchased the distillery in 1861, they modified the structures somewhat and enlarged both the Warehouse and Jug House, probably during the 1880's. after prohibition went into effect, Horst Bomberger sold the distillery property to Ephraim Sechrist. In 1933 Sechrist erected a three-story brick bottling plant north of the Still House, and in 1934 he reopened the distillery. Little additional expansion took place until after World War II. In 1946 a 2 1/2-story farmhouse, situated between the Still House and Jug House and perhaps dating back to the late 18th century, was demolished and a 100-foot distilling tower and a small cistern building were erected in its place. Also constructed at this time were a fermenting and granary building, a dried grain building, and a machine shop. The last major construction took place in 1950 when three large cement block warehouses were constructed, each of which had a storage capacity of 20,000 barrels. (continued)

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	X AGRICULTURE	ECONOMICS	LITERATURE	SCULPTURE
1600-1699	ARCHITECTURE	EDUCATION	MILITARY	SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
X_1700-1799	ART	ENGINEERING	MUSIC	THEATER
X_1800-1899	COMMERCE	EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	TPHILOSOPHY	TRANSPORTATION
<u>X</u> 1900-	COMMUNICATIONS	<u>X</u> NDUSTRY	POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	OTHER (SPECIFY)
		INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES Site: 1753-present Builder/ARCHITECT Abe Bomberger Buildings: ca. 1840 present Abe Bomberger

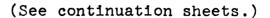
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The distillation of spirituous liquors is a major American industry, and the Bomberger Distillery, whose origins can be traced back to 1753, is both the Nation's oldest distillery and a primary extant example of the small scale commercial distilling operations which enabled the United States, according to historians Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont, to become "the world's largest producer -- and largest consumer -- of whiskey."1 Although whiskey had been produced and consumed in limited quantities in the colonies since late in the 17th century, it did not begin to displace rum as the favorite hard liquor until around the time of the Revolution. Pioneer business historian Victor S. Clark attributes this shift to the fact that "whiskey was made everywhere, as commonly as grain was ground, and was bartered with farmers -- a gallon of whisky for a bushel of corn." As a result, "habit extended a taste for whisky in proportion as the farming population multiplied," thus fayoring "the wider distribution and larger production of whisky."2

Bomberger's also represents the transformation of whiskey distilling from an agricultural enterprise, carried on in conjunction with other farming activities, to the status of a full scale industry in its own right. When John and Michael Shenk constructed the first distillery on the site in 1753, it was only an adjunct to their gristmill and other farming operations, and most of its output probably was consumed in the neighboring vicinity. During the 1780's, however, Michael Shenk's son-in-law, Rudolph Meyer, took over the operation, added two new stills, and began to concentrate on distilling in response to the demand of neighboring farmers that their grain be converted to alcohol so that it could be profitably marketed. By the time the (continued)

Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont, Eating in America: A History (New York, 1976), 381.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Victor S. Clark, <u>History of Manufactures in the United</u> States, 1607-1860, Vol. I (New York, 1949), 480.



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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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CONTINUATION SHEET Bomberger's

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This southeastwardly facing, 2 1/2-story edifice is of wood frame construction and is sheathed in clapboards which have been painted a bright cream and trimmed in brown. The structure rests on reddish sandstone block foundations over a partially raised full basement and is capped with an overhanging gable roof which has brown trim. Most windows are of the six-over-six wood sash variety and are set in rectangular surrounds which feature brown trim. The rectangular shaped main entrance has a six-panel wood door which bears the legend "A. Bomberger and Sons" under its coat of paint. Until recently this door had its original mid-19th-century hardware. but OSHA has ruled that this type of equipment does not meet minimum safety standards and has forced the distillery's owners to install the modern variety. The front steps are constructed of millstones which may have been used in John and Michael Shenk's 1753 gristmill. Exterior alteration appears to have been minimal. In the early 1900's a one-story gabled monitor with six-over-six wood sash windows was added to the rear portion of the roof, and in 1946 a five-story distilling tower was attached to the southwest side. Old photographs show that six-over-six sash type windows once graced the upper half story of the front facade and that a brick chimney once existed at the rear, all of which are now gone. symbols that are visible on the front facade are of recent vintage and were designed and put into place by one of the Nation's leading hexologists.

Inside, the distillery probably looks much as it did in 1840. The recent restoration for the most part consisted of removing structural elements that were clearly 20th century in origin so as to reveal the original woodwork. Some beams and structural posts are hand hewn and held together by wooden pegs while others show the deep impressions of the early circular saw. The roof support uses the familiar leaning purlin posts so commonly used in 19th-century barns and mills, and rafters are numbered in pairs using Roman numerals.

Presently, the building houses what is believed to be the world's smallest legal distilling operation, producing one barrel of pot still whiskey daily. During the summer months, a mule drawn wagon brings grain to the Still House, and this grain is hoisted to the third floor level where by a series of chutes it is gravity fed into a cooker and three cypress fermenter tubs on the second floor. After three days the

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fermented mash goes into the two reconstructed pot stills on the first floor. These hand-hammered copper stills were constructed by the Vendome Brass and Copper Works of Louisville, Ky., using 19th-century plans, and they are typical of the type of still used in the thousands of small distilleries that once dotted the Nation. After the distilling phase is over, the product goes into a holding tank before being placed in a barrel for aging. At the end of the working day, the mule drawn wagon comes back, picks up the barrel, and takes it to the warehouse where the whiskey is aged for several years prior to bottling.

Warehouse. This southeastwardly facing, 1 1/2-story structure is located behind the Still House and is believed to be the oldest distillery warehouse in America still being utilized to store and age whiskey. This building undoubtedly was erected in two phases. The lower portion is constructed of salmon-colored hand-made brick whose mortar contains large chunks of limestone. These heavy brick walls rest on reddish sandstone blocks similar to those under the Still House. Sometime before 1900 the Bombergers raised the overhanging gable roof in order to allow the storage of more barrels. This upper portion is of frame construction and is sheathed in oak planking. Apparently, at the same time the warehouse was enlarged, its first floor windows were bricked up. Presently the building's only windows are on the sides of the upper portion, and all are of the steel sash variety.

Inside, this edifice appears to have undergone little alteration except for the removal of its barrel racks. The major structural elements visible here are both hand hewn and circular sawed. Presently, the building is the major starting point for distillery tours and contains a number of diagrams that explain the distilling process, samples of the raw materials used, and empty whiskey barrels. Also present is an original piece of equipment. It is a Howe scale for weighing whiskey barrels and is believed to be approximately 100 years old. Approximately half of the Warehouse is still used for whiskey storage, and this area is caged with heavy steel mesh wire.

Jug House. This southeastwardly facing structure was probably constructed in two phases. The two-story portion probably (continued)

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three

dates from around 1840, while the 1 1/2-story section was probably constructed during the Bomberger era. Both parts are of wood frame construction; are sheathed in bright cream-colored clapboards which have a brown trim; and are capped with over-hanging gabled roofs. Most windows are of the two-over-two wood sash variety and are set in brown trimmed rectangular surrounds. Originally, the northeast end of the building had a one-bay-wide overhang, but in recent years this open area has been enclosed and is part of the Jug House proper.

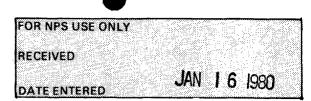
Inside, the building has been restored to what was probably its original appearance by removing 20th-century structural elements. Originally, the interior walls were lined with barrels of whiskey, and local residents often dropped by to fill their jugs. Today there are no barrels here, and the Jug House is the assembly point for distillery tours. At the end of these tours visitors are brought back here so that they can purchase souvenirs, including pot still whiskey in a variety of sizes and containers. At present this is the only distillery in the United States which is allowed to sell its product on the premises.

Other Structures. Within the boundary of the inventoried property are four structures that do not contribute to its national significance, although some of the furnishings (dona cans in distilling tower) do. Connected to the Still House on its southwest side is a five-story distilling tower of brick and glass construction. This square-shaped edifice is capped with a water tank in the shape of a Michter's Jug, containing approximately 1.75 million shots of water. On the lower level of the distilling tower are two hand-hammered copper dona cans used for yeast production. These are original to the site and are believed to be 150 years old. At the rear of the Still House is a two-story brick structure of uncertain vintage. mately 10 feet south of the distilling tower is a two-story, square-shaped cistern constructed of brick and glass. At the rear of the Jug House and connected to it by a covered passageway is a modular housing unit which is used to provide additional office space for the distillery.

(continued)



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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET Bomberger's ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE four

Boundary Justification. The boundary of the inventoried property contains approximately .4 of the 21.656 acres that comprise the distillery complex. Except for the "other structures" which are noted above, the boundary includes only the most historic buildings.

Boundary Description. As indicated in red on the accompanying maps [(1) U.S.G.S. 7.5' Series, Pa., Richland Quad., 1955, photorevised 1969; (2) Distillers, Inc. plat map, 1974], a line beginning at an unmarked point at the intersection of the western edge of the right-of-way of Township Road Route #T-325 and a line parallel to the exterior plane of the north wall of the Warehouse and extending northwestward approximately 100 feet along said line to an unmarked point on a line parallel to the exterior plane of the west wall of the Warehouse; thence, southwestward approximately 180 feet along said line to an unmarked point on the north edge of an unpaved right-of-way road; thence, southeastward approximately 100 feet along the north edge of said road to the point where it intersects with the western edge of the right-of-way of Township Road Route #T-325; thence, northeastward along the western edge of the right-of-way of Township Road Route #T-325 to the point of beginning.

Continuation Sheet Bomberger's Item Number 9 Page two

Michter's Distillery Newspaper Clipping Files.

Michter's Distillery, Inc., <u>Michter's: The Whiskey That Warmed</u>
the Revolution (Schaefferstown, Pa.: Michter's Distillery,
Inc., n.d.).

National Register Inventory Form for Bomberger's Distillery, 1975.

Root, Waverly and Richard de Rochemont, <u>Eating in America: A History</u> (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976).



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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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property passed to other Shenk relatives, John Kratzer who operated the distillery from 1827 to 1860) and Abe Bomberger (whose family ran it from 1861 to 1919), distilling had become a full time occupation almost entirely divorced from farming.

The Bomberger Distillery also commemorates the whiskey-making techniques of the Swiss Mennonites, who, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, "produced the first colonial whiskey in Pennsylvania in 1683, using a pot still." Bomberger's is the last surviving link to the period of 1780 to 1840 when Pennsylvania led the Nation in whiskey distilling. In 1810 the state had 3,594 distilleries which produced over 6.5 million gallons of whiskey, more than 8 gallons for every resident. Today, only one of these distilleries, Bomberger's, remains in operation.

Situated in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country and surrounded by lush farms, the Bomberger Distillery continues to utilize locally grown grain and sparkling clean Blue Mountain water to produce a pot still whiskey much like that made by John and Michael Shenk in 1753. Although the distillery has been expanded somewhat over the years, a Still House, Warehouse, and Jug House, dating from around 1840, have continued to be utilized. Recently restored to their 19th-century appearance, these structures constitute a working museum which enables visitors to understand early distilling processes. Bomberger's not only occupies the oldest known whiskey distilling site in the Nation, but utilizes the oldest distilling buildings as well.

(continued)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, <u>The</u>
Beverage Alcohol Industry: Public Attitudes and Economic Progress
(Washington, 1975), 16.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET Bomberger's

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#### History

The American people, in the opinion of Root and de Rochemont, "have never been content with the taste, or lack of taste, of water" and have been "heavy drinkers from the beginning of their history." In fact, one of the reasons the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620 instead of further south as they had intended was the exhaustion of their food supply, particularly their beer. Later groups of colonists came better prepared, and one group of Puritans is said to have arrived with 42 tons of beer and 10,000 gallons of wine. Almost from the beginning of settlement, the colonists made their own beer and wine, utilizing a wide variety of raw materials, including pumpkins, parsnips, and walnut chips.

For a few years, however, distilled alcoholic beverages had to be imported, because many of the early colonists were unfamiliar with distillation processes and those few that were had little time to put them into practice because of the exigencies of life in the early settlements. William Kieft, a Dutchman, is generally credited with establishing the first distillery on American soil in 1640 when he built a facility on Staten Island to produce brandy and gin. Before 1650 colonists in Virginia had begun to use pot stills to manufacture brandy from such fruits as peaches, pears, cherries, plums, crabapples, and apples. Distilling on a truly commercial scale did not begin until 1657 when the first rum distillery was established in Boston. For over a century, New England rum was not only the principal distilled drink consumed in the colonies but was one of the mainstays of the famed triangular trade between that region, Africa, and the West Indies.

Toward the end of the 17th century, whiskey, which eventually challenged and then greatly surpassed rum in popularity, began to appear on colonial tables. According to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, "available evidence makes it difficult to accurately pinpoint the first appearance of distilled whiskey in America. But it is thought that the Mennonites, who followed William Penn to America, produced the first colonial whiskey in Pennsylvania in 1683, using a pot still." Whiskey production received an additional boost between 1716 and 1733 when large numbers of Irish and Scottish immigrants arrived, many of whom had been distillers in their native lands. (continued)

4Root and de Rochemont, Eating in America, 356.
5Distilled Spirits Council, The Beverage Alcohol Industry, 16.



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Initially these early distillers produced only rye whiskey. In their native land most of them had distilled whiskeys whose principal ingredient was barley malt, but because barley proved so slow in acclimating itself to the new world, they turned to rye, the only grain with which they were familiar and which could be easily grown on American soil. Later they discovered that adding native corn to the rye mash greatly improved the quality and taste of the finished product. "The next step," say Root and de Rochemont, "was to use corn alone, which produced a lighter and sweeter whiskey."

The origins of the Bomberger Distillery can be traced back to this initial phase in the development of whiskey making. In 1753 John Shenk, a Swiss Mennonite farmer, and his brother Michael built a gristmill and distillery on the banks of Snitzel Creek on the present Bomberger site. For many years, the distillery was only an adjunct to milling and other farming operations, and it was used to convert the excess fruits and grains of local farmers into alcohol, most of which was probably consumed in the immediate vicinity.

Around the end of the Revolution, however, the Shenks decided to enlarge the size of their distilling operation. They were motivated not only by the increasing demand for whiskey, as it displaced rum as the Nation's favorite hard liquor, but by the desire of neighboring farmers to have their grain converted into alcohol, which was not only easier to market but brought greater profits. "A horse could transport four bushels of rye at a time," says historian Leland D. Baldwin, "but turn it into whiskey and he could carry twenty-four--that is, two eight-gallon kegs."

During the early 1780's Rudolph Meyer, who was Michael Shenk's son-in-law, was placed in charge of the distillery, and it was he who began its transformation from an agricultural operation to an industrial and commercial one. By 1782 two stills were in operation, and by 1790 an additional one had been added. Apparently, the principal product was rye whiskey, most of which was probably placed in kegs and transported to Philadelphia by pack horse. (continued)

<sup>7</sup>Leland D. Baldwin, Whiskey Rebels: The Story of a Frontier Uprising (Pittsburgh, 1939), 25.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>Root and de Rochemont, <u>Eating in America</u>, 108.



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After Meyer's death, Elizabeth Shenk Kratzer, a grand-daughter of one of the founders, inherited the distillery, and her husband John operated it from 1827 to 1860. In 1861 she sold the property to Abe Bomberger, whose wife was a Shenk descendant, and he ran the distillery until his death in 1906. Horst Bomberger then succeeded his father and operated the facility until the implementation of prohibition in 1919. During the Kratzer and Bomberger eras, rye whiskey remained the principal product, but some corn whiskey was probably produced as well.

Since the repeal of prohibition in 1933, the old distillery has had a succession of owners, including the Lebanon Valley Distilling Company, Schenley, and Pennso Distillers among others, and for the most part has produced whiskey in bulk for other distillers. In 1975 it was reorganized as Michter's Distillery, Inc., and now exclusively produces a pot still whiskey based on the formula used during the Bomberger era.

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

#### CONTINUATION SHEET Bomberger's ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE one

- Arthur J. Lawton to Louis Forman, February 23, 1978.
  Copy in Historic Landmarks Project Files, AASLH,
  Nashville, Tennessee.
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  <u>Uprising</u> (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1939).
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