

1903

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

OCT 1989

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 Mount Airy Historic District
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Route 603, between Routes 179 and 601 not for publication
city, town West Amwell Township vicinity
state NJ code 034 county Hunterdon code 019 zip code 08530

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>26</u>	<u>14</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>28</u>	<u>17</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
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.
William D. Deuschle 9/14/89
Signature of certifying official Date
Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources/DSHPO
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:) _____
William Byers 11/13/89
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Entered in the
National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Industry/manufacturing facilityDomestic/single familyCommerce/businessEducation/schoolReligion/religious structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single familyReligion/religious structureAgriculture/agricultural field
& outbuilding

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Mid-19th century/Greek & GothicEarly Republic/FederalColonial

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stonewalls weatherboardsyntheticroof slateother synthetic

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The village of Mount Airy is located in the Piedmont geographical province of north-central New Jersey, near the western end of the broad, rolling Amwell valley of southern Hunterdon County, about three miles east of the Delaware River. Sited along the Old York Road (whose path is generally followed by present day Route 179) at its crossing of Alexauken Creek, a tributary of the Delaware, the small village is divided into two sections. A water power site in use by 1752 provided the nucleus for the northern part of the settlement, where there are five houses loosely clustered near the remains of an old grist mill. The major portion of the village, however, lies to the south at the tip of a low hill, which rises up sharply from the creek, around the intersection of two roads. It consists of a church, storehouse, row of buildings along Route 603 - a short section of the Old York Road bypassed by Route 179 - and a few somewhat more dispersed dwellings. The Presbyterian church, founded in 1754, evidently was the original focal point for this portion of the village. The community is surrounded by a mixture of wood, pasture, and cropland; several farmsteads adjoin its edge, and modern dwellings and businesses are scattered along Route 179.

The Mount Airy district encompasses both parts of the village, including a number of adjoining farmsteads, but excludes the modern buildings along Route 179. An inventory of all the district's resources forms part of this section, and the resources have been categorized as "contributing" or "non-contributing" to the district's historical significance. Of the 28 contributing resources, nearly all are 19th-century buildings; three, however, are 18th-century buildings and two are 18th/19th-century sites (#13, mill remnants and #19, a cemetery). There are 17 non-contributing resources, all of 20th-century date, 14 buildings and three structures: a swimming pool (#1), a well curb (#7) and a silo (#15).

The district contains 22 principal buildings with attendant outbuildings. Except for a few commercial and institutional buildings, they are all dwellings, and for descriptive purposes, a typology of the traditional and popular house types present was employed in the inventory. The district's buildings are for the most part frame, gable-roofed, vernacular structures of moderate size, that date to the first three quarters of the 19th century and exhibit simple stylistic embellishment typical of that era. Most have been enlarged or refurbished over the years. Modern improvements, while resulting in the loss or obscuring of early fabric and detailing in some cases, have been neither numerous nor disfig-

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 7 Page 2

uring enough to mar the historic architectural character of the district. The buildings mostly are in good condition and well maintained.

In general, the district's buildings are rather closely spaced on small lots and face the road with short setbacks. While the row along Route 603 in the upper village forms a tight streetscape, the other buildings there and those near the creek are more loosely grouped. In the latter section all of the houses face south, an orientation typical of the region's dispersed rural dwellings. As was commonly the practice, the door-yards of a number of houses are fenced. Yards generally are landscaped and well kept.

Mount Airy's architecture is representative of the region's vernacular construction practices and building types. Comprising a majority of the district's dwellings are the traditional, 2-story, gable-roofed house types with single-pile or occasionally double-pile plans, regular facades of three to five bays, and interior gable-end chimneys. Such dwellings are ubiquitous in the Delaware Valley's 18th and 19th century housing stock. While there is at least one example in the district which perhaps predates 1800 (#13), most examples, such as #s 1, 4, 6, 8, 10-12, 14, 17, and 22, were built between about 1810 and 1870. Although falling out of favor by the middle decades of the 19th-century, traditional 1 1/2-story houses were prevalent in the area at an early date. Mount Airy has two early examples with single-pile plans and gable-end chimneys, #15 and #11's west wing, both evidently dating to 1800 or before.

While the exterior of some of the district's dwellings are quite unadorned, most exhibit some decorative detailing, at least at the eaves and front entry. The embellishment of these vernacular structures was derived from several of the architectural styles popular in the 18th and 19th century. Georgian influences are apparent in the heavily molded box cornice of #13 and the Roman-ovolo molded window trim of #6, and the delicately molded door surrounds of #12 are clearly Federal in style. Greek Revival motifs include the sidelights and plain pilasters at the entry of #4, the Grecian-ovolo moldings employed for the cornice and several window surrounds of #6, and #10's built-up box cornice with wide frieze and pilaster-like corner boards.

The 19th Victorian and early 20th-century styles also influenced village builders to some degree. A number of houses (#s 1, 6, 8, and 17) have such Italianate-derived elements as overhanging eaves or bracketed cornices, and the porches and bay windows of a few houses (#s 4, 12, and 17) are somewhat more eclectic Victorian in character. The village school (#18), a frame, 1-story, gable-roofed structure built in 1877 and now used for church purposes, also

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetMount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 7 Page 3

exhibits Italianate influences with its overhanging eaves and round-headed windows. Like most of the region's 19th-century school houses, it is gable-fronted and has a one-room plan. The district's only institution and Mount Airy's most architecturally impressive building, the Second English Presbyterian Church (#19), is Gothic Revival in style. The frame church erected in 1874, albeit somewhat unsophisticated in design and execution, incorporates features typical of the style such as point-arched windows, decorative buttresses, and most dramatically the asymmetrically placed bell tower whose attenuated spire dominates the village. Craftsman and Colonial Revival influences can be seen in the overhanging eaves, wood shingle siding, classically derived porch detailing of a few houses (#s 2, 9, 15, and 22) built or remodeled in the early 20th century.

Outbuildings are commonly found behind the district's houses. They include privys, small barns or wagon houses, tool or wood sheds, and modern garages. They are typically unadorned frame structures of small size. Not surprisingly, more extensive complexes of outbuildings are found at three farmsteads in the district, #s 15, 17, and 22. Representative of the area's 19th/early 20th century farm culture, they are dominated by large barns, around which are grouped wagon houses, chicken coops, and other structures.

Mid-19th century maps and other sources indicate that besides its taverns, both of which were housed in domestic structures, Mount Airy had several industrial and commercial buildings. A blacksmith shop, wheelright shop, and a grist mill were located near the creek. While the two artisan shops have disappeared almost without a trace (at least as above-ground features), the well-preserved foundation of the grist mill (see #13) and its hydrosystem have survived. Within the embanked, coursed rubble-stone foundation of the mill can be seen the wheel pit, and on the north wall the partially buried, voussoir-outlined archway through which the wheel pit emptied into the tail race. The head race stretches along the side of the ravine cut by the creek for about 100 yards and terminates at the breached remains of the mill pond dam.

Mount Airy's one intact resource in the commercial/industrial category is Holcomb's Storehouse (#16), a local landmark standing across the road from the church. Probably erected in the late 18th century, it is an unadorned, coursed rubble stone, 2 1/2-story structure whose gable-end front is crowned by an overhanging hoist at the ridge peak below which is a large doorway on each story. Protected by a small, gabled cover, the hoist pulley and rope by which goods were raised to and lowered from the upper floors remains intact.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetMount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 7 Page 4

An inventory of all structures and sites within the district has been prepared as part of this description. Each principal structure and site is identified by a number which locates it on the accompanying district map. All entries have been categorized as "contributing" or "non-contributing" to the significance of the district. All outbuildings included in the inventory are contributing unless individually identified with the designation (NC). To facilitate their description, most of the dwellings have been classified according to a typology of the traditional and popular house types found in the area. Identified by letter, each type found in Mount Airy is defined in the following typology:

- A-type A 1 1/2-story, single-pile dwelling with either a one-room plan or a two-room "hall and parlor" plan. The former generally has a two-bay facade, the latter a three or four-bay facade. Interior gable-end chimney placement is characteristic. A few two-room-plan examples, however, have central chimneys which arrangement has both German and English antecedents. The type has been described by folklorists, cultural geographers, and architectural historians as both a "British cabin" and an "east Jersey cottage." Widely distributed in northern New Jersey, the type is associated with both the Delaware Valley and the east Jersey/Long Island culture regions. It was much more prevalent and remained more popular to a later date in the latter area.
- I-type A 2-story, gable-roofed, single-pile dwelling with either a one or two-room plan. Fenestration patterns include two-bay; two-over-three-bay and three-bay with center entries; and four-bay with a single or paired inner-bay entries and occasionally end-bay entry. Chimney placement is gable end. Cultural geographers hold type's origins to be English and its American cultural hearth to be the lower Delaware Valley and Chesapeake Bay regions. It was widely built in the Delaware Valley from the 18th century until the early 1900s.
- H-type A 2-story, gable-roofed, single-pile dwelling with a center-hall plan, a symmetrical five-bay (or occasionally three-bay) facade and gable-end chimneys. This type evidently is a Georgian style transformation of the I-type and is common to the same regions as the I-type. Locally, however, it fell out of favor after the middle decades of the 19th century.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetMount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 7 Page 5

L-type A two story, double-pile dwelling with a side-hall plan and a regular three-bay facade. It usually has one or two chimneys within one gable end or, less frequently, an interior chimney. It is two-thirds of the classic Georgian center-hall house and is widely distributed throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. Locally, it was popular into the middle decades of the 19th century.

Mount Airy District Inventory

1 Frame, 5-bay, H-type dwelling with a modern brick exterior chimney on the west gable end and a 2-story ell on the rear at the east end; the foundation is in place for another addition on the rear.

Style: Italianate influences

Date: c. 1850-70

Exterior features include overhanging eaves, 6/6 and 2/2 sash windows with plain trim, a central entry with 2-light transom and panel door, and a 1-bay flat-roofed entry porch with box cornice. The square porch posts are modern replacements, as is the aluminum siding.

Outbuildings: (1) frame, 2-story wagon house (later 19th) with shed appendages on both sides, gable-end entries, and clapboard siding, (2) an in-ground swimming pool with cabana (NC), and a modern metal-sided pole barn (NC).

Contributing

B10/L1

Neg. # B 12-15

2. Frame, 2-bay, 2 1/2-story, hip-roofed dwelling with brick-stacked interior chimney.

Style: Colonial Revival/Craftsman
influences

Date: c. 1910-30

Original exterior fabric includes wood shingle siding above the clapboarded first story, wide overhanging eaves, a hip-roofed imbricated slate-clad dormer, 1/1 sash windows with plain trim, and an L-shaped porch with box cornice and square posts with molded capitals and bases. The enclosure of the western portion of the porch is a modern alteration.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Section number 7 Page 6

Outbuildings: (1) frame privy and (2) frame, chicken coop (late 19th or 20th) (NC).

Non-contributing B10/12 Neg.# B 16 & 17

- 3 Brick, 1-story, gable-roofed dwelling with attached 2-bay garage and clapboard-clad gables.

Style: None

Date: c. 1950's

Non-contributing B10/L2.01 Neg.# B 18

- 4 Frame, 2-story, gable-roofed double-pile dwelling, evidently built in two parts, consisting of a 3-bay, L-type unit to the east and a 2 over 3-bay extension to the west.

Style: Greek Revival and eclectic
Victorian influences

Date: c. 1830-60 &
enlarged c. 1870-85

Exterior features include clapboard siding, a standing-seam metal roof, a box cornice, stone foundation, and a modern shed-roofed porch across the front with hipped ends, octagonal posts on a fieldstone balustrade wall. The original east section has flush eaves on the east gable end, 6/6 sash windows, and front entry with sidelights above panels, plain pilasters, and a 4-panel door (recessed "octagonal" panels). The west extension has boxed overhanging eaves on the west gable end, 2/2 sash windows, a front entry with 4-panel door, and on the west gable end a semi-octagonal bay window with box cornice and paneled spandrels and a 2-bay flat-roofed porch with box cornice, square chamfered posts, and "arcade" brackets.

Contributing B10/L3 Neg.# B 22-24

- 5 Stuccoed, 2-story, gable-roofed garage/apartment which originally may have been a barn/wagon house.

Style: none

Date: possibly late 19th
or early 20th,
remodeled mid-20th

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Section number 7 Page 8

It retains overhanging eaves, vertical siding and a batten-doored loft entry on the west side. The overhead garage doors on the west side and the aluminum siding on the other elevations are modern alterations. It probably originally served the tavern next door.

Contributing B10/L6.01 Neg.# B 29

- 8 Frame, 5-bay H-type dwelling with brick exterior west gable-end chimney (modern) and a shed-roofed rear ell.

Style: Italianate influences Date: c. 1850-74

It has boxed overhanging eaves, clapboard siding, 6/1 sash windows with architrave trim, and modern porch on the west gable-end. The front entry has been replaced by a window and the entry porch removed.

Outbuildings: modern, cement-block garage (NC).

Contributing B10/L7 Neg.# B 30 & 31

- 9 Frame, 1-story, gable-roofed dwelling with a rear ell.

Style: Craftsman influences Date: mid-19th

Exterior features include overhanging eaves, asbestos shingle siding, double 6/1 sash windows, and a recessed corner porch with square post and balusters.

Non-contributing B10/L8 Neg.# B 33

- 10 Old Presbyterian Church Parsonage. Frame, gable-roofed dwelling consisting of a 3-bay L-type main block with west gable-end chimney (brick stack) and a 2-bay I-type east wing with gable-end chimney (brick stack).

Style: Greek Revival influences Date: c. 1830-50

It has clapboard and wood shingle siding, built-up box cornices, flush raking eaves, and pilaster strips on the main block, flush eaves on the wing, and 6/6 sash windows. The shallow gable vestibule at the main

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Section number 7 Page 9

entry is a modern alteration, as is the enclosure of the wing's shed-roofed front porch.

Outbuildings: modern, frame, 1-bay, gable-roofed garage (NC).

Contributing B7.01/L/12 Neg.# C 3 & 4

- 11 Frame gable-roofed dwelling consisting of a 4-bay, I-type main block with gable-end chimneys (brick stacks) and a 3-bay A-type west wing with gable-end chimney (brick stack).

Style: Federal influences Date: c. 1810-30,
wing prob. earlier

Exterior features include clapboard siding (including considerable quirk-beaded clapboarding on the wing), a box cornice, flush raking eaves, 9/6, 6/6 and 6/3 sash windows with architrave trim, and inner bay entries (both front and rear) with transom, molded transom bar, 5-panel door, and symmetrically molded pilaster-like trim with corner blocks. The wing probably had a central entry on the south side, now a window; a large modern multi-pane window has been installed to its east and there is a shed-roofed porch with hipped ends, square posts on the west gable end.

The owner states that it was once connected to its near neighbor, #12, although there is no evidence of any hyphen.

Outbuildings: The historical record indicates that both wheelwright and blacksmith shops were appurtenant to this house and its neighbor, #12; traces of the foundation of what is said to have been the wheelwright shop remain by the creek to the SW.

Contributing B13/L3 Neg.# C 9 & 13-19, 22

- 12 Frame gable-roofed dwelling consisting of a 4-bay, I-type main block with gable-end chimneys (brick stacks, outside of covered exposed back on east chimney) and a 2-bay A-type west wing.

Style: Federal and Victorian Date: c. 1820-40
eclectic influences

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Section number 7 Page 11

Style: Italianate/Greek Revival
influences

Date: c. 1860-73,
poss. earlier

It has aluminum siding, a box cornice with returns and frieze that is carried on the raking eaves, 6/6 and 2/2 sash windows, an inner-bay front entry with glass and panel door, a front porch with low-pitched roof, box cornice, and modern replacement posts, and a 1-story projecting bay with low-pitched roof on the front of the cross-gabled addition.

Outbuildings: (1) modern, frame, 2-bay garage (NC) and (2) small, frame, 1 1/2-story, gable-roofed shed/barn with a shed-roofed rear appendage (built in two parts), overhanging eaves, and clapboard siding; probably of late 19th-century date.

Contributing

B13/L2

Neg.# C 5-7

15

Old Mount Airy Tavern. Frame, dwelling consisting of a 4-bay, A-type (probably built in two parts) with west gable-end chimney (stone stack) and modern extension (recessed 1-bay porch) and a 2-story rear wing whose roof continues the slope of the main block's roof.

Style: Colonial with Craftsman
embellishment

Date: late 18th enlarged
& remodeled early
20th century

This house was enlarged and remodeled in the Craftsman style early in this century and renovated again more recently during which the Craftsman siding and front porch (visible in old photographs) were obscured or removed. It has aluminum siding, overhanging eaves, gable dormers with paired windows, mostly 2/2 sash windows and an inner-bay front entry with glass and panel door.

Outbuildings: (1) modern, frame garage (NC), (2) frame, 2-story wagon house with gable end entries, built-in corn cribs on the side walls, overhanging eaves and clapboard siding, (3) small, frame, English barn with shed appendages on the west gable end, a modern stable ell set perpendicularly to the SE corner, overhanging eaves, and clapboard siding; the walls of the main barn have been partially rebuilt in cement block. Both the wagon house and barn

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetMount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 7 Page 15

- 21 Frame, 2-story, 5-bay, hip-roofed, dwelling (possibly an H-type) with a stone foundation and rear ell. It may be an earlier house which was extensively reworked in the early 20th century.

Style: Colonial Revival influences Date: c. 1910-30
poss. earlier

Exterior features include clapboard siding, boxed overhanging eaves, a hip dormer with small-pane bordered window, 1/1 sash windows with small cornices and louvered shutters, and a central entry; there probably was a front porch which has been removed. The cellar is slightly embanked and has a 6-light window in front.

Outbuildings: frame, 2-story gable-roofed wagon house (late 19th or early 20th-century date) with side-wall entries, vertical siding, overhanging eaves, and 6/6 sash windows.

Contributing B11/L6 Neg. #B 7&8

- 22 Frame, gable-roofed, single-pile dwelling consisting of a 4-bay I-type with gable-end chimney (brick stack) and a 2-bay, 2 1/2-story west extension with a gable-end chimney (brick stack); both sections have the same roof line.

Style: Italianate influences Date: c. 1830-60

It has clapboard and asbestos shingle siding, boxed overhanging eaves, various sash windows, a hip-roofed porch on the I-type, secondary entry with bracketed gable hood, and an enclosed shed-roofed porch on the west gable end.

Outbuildings: The large barn complex includes: (1) a frame dairy barn, of late-19th or early 20th-century date, with square louvered cupolas and two attached silos; and (2) a frame, 1 1/2-story wagon house with shed appendage, gable-end entries, and clapboard siding (19th-century date); and several other frame buildings.

The inaccessibility of the property prevented a more detailed description.

Contributing B11/L5 Neg. # C 1 & 2

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 N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
Architecture	1750-1881	N/A
Commerce		
Settlement		
Industry		
	Cultural Affiliation	
	N/A	
Significant Person	Architect/Builder	
N/A	N/A	

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

Mount Airy possesses significance in the areas of settlement, architecture, commerce, and industry. The village exemplifies the small agglomerate settlements that proliferated throughout the region in the 18th and 19th centuries to serve its dispersed agricultural population, but whose growth largely halted when by-passed by 19th-century transportation innovations. The district has architectural significance as an assemblage of modest, largely 19th-century buildings whose construction, form, detailing, and spatial organization are representative of the rural region's vernacular architecture in that era. The village possesses commercial significance because of Holcomb's Storehouse (#16) which, probably dating to the late 18th century, is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, surviving commercial building in Hunterdon County. Such early stores played an important economic role as collection points for surplus local agricultural products and as distribution centers for goods and food stuffs that were not produced locally. The industrial significance of Mount Airy stems from its mill seat (at #13), evidently one of the neighborhood's earliest, whose history is representative of that of the small-scaled water-powered industry once characteristic of the region.

With a grist mill and church by the mid-18th century, Mount Airy was one of the earliest settlements to occur in the area, and acquiring a tavern and store most likely before 1800, it became a place of some local importance in the first half of the 19th century. In the period when the movement of people and goods was largely limited to horse-drawn conveyances, such small communities provided the region's isolated rural population with almost its only centers for commercial and social activity. Although located on one of the region's earliest and most important roads (the Old York Road), the village was by-passed in the 19th century's canal and railroad building booms, and overshadowed by its near neighbor, Lambertville, which with such transportation advantages became Hunterdon County's largest town in the mid-19th century, the village has grown and changed little since that time.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A
 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: N/A
 State historic preservation office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 104.79 Stockton, NJ-PA Quad

UTM References

A

1	8	5	0	8	7	2	0	4	4	7	2	1	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

1	8	5	0	7	9	0	0	4	4	7	1	1	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

1	8	5	0	7	5	4	0	4	4	7	1	3	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

1	8	5	0	7	9	2	0	4	4	7	2	4	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 1 8 5 0 8 1 6 0 4 4 7 2 5 0 0

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dennis Bertland
organization Bertland Associates date November 1988
street & number P.O. Box 11 telephone 201-689-6356
city or town Port Murray state NJ zip code 07865

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetMount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 8 Page 2

As a result Mount Airy has managed to preserve much of its 19th-century character, unlike Rocktown, West Amwell Township's only other village, where considerable modern development has occurred. Nearly all of the twenty-two principal buildings in the district were built c. 1800-80, and a few evidently pre-date 1800. The distinctive historical character of the village results from the survival of these buildings, their organization into two distinct groupings (the larger of which is linear) around focal points, and their juxtaposition with the surrounding open country-side. The district's buildings - mostly dwellings with attendant outbuildings, but including a church, school and a storehouse - are in general well preserved and evidence relatively few modern alterations. Collectively they possess architectural significance. Their forms, construction, decorative embellishment, and siting provide a representative illustration of the rural region's essentially vernacular architecture in the first three-quarters of the 19th-century. Several buildings are of some individual note: the 1874 Carpenter Gothic Presbyterian church (#19) whose tall asymmetrically placed steeple is a local landmark visible from some miles away and Holcomb's Storehouse (#16), a utilitarian stone structure of late 18th-century date, which retains its overhanging gable hoist complete with pulley and rope. Although the community's grist mill itself has not survived, the well-preserved remnants of its foundation and hydrosystem have the potential to yield important archaeological information about the area's 18th and 19th-century industrial development, and archaeological resources also may exist in the environs of other district buildings.

European settlement began in the Amwell valley of southern Hunterdon County in the first decades of the 18th century, initiated largely by pioneer agriculturalists of English, Dutch, and German stock.¹ The Old York Road, opened through the valley in the second decade of the century along an Indian trail, provided both a road for settlers coming into the area and a major inter-colonial route linking Philadelphia and New York.² While ownership of property around what became Mount Airy can be traced back to a 1710 deed for a 427 acre tract which included at least part of its site, the earliest record of any settlement there comes from a 1752 newspaper advertisement.³ The advertisement offered for sale a 56-acre property, owned by Benjamin Smith and comprising the land between Alexauken Creek and the Harbourton road (Route 601) at Mount Airy, which was improved with an overshot grist mill, dwelling house, stable, and seven acres of cleared and fenced meadow land planted in clover. That the mill was described as "lately rebuilt" suggests that the property had been occupied for some time, as does the characterization of the neighborhood as "an extraordinary thick settled part of Amwell."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetMount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 8 Page 3

Benjamin Smith purchased the 56-acre tract in 1750 from Jonathan Stout whose large family was among the earliest settlers in southern Hunterdon County.⁴ While Stout may have lived on the property and operated the mill, it does not appear that either Smith or his brother Robert who inherited the property from him in 1755 resided there. The 1752 newspaper advertisement noted that Benjamin Smith lived at a place along the Delaware River in Amwell, about fifteen miles from Trenton, where he owned a valuable property with two grist mills, a storehouse, and a substantial dwelling. Robert Smith evidently lived in Burlington County. Both were large landowners for whom⁵ the mill lot on the Alexauken Creek was but one of several investment properties.

The nascent community acquired a church and at least one other dwelling in the 1750s. In 1754 residents of the western Amwell area petitioned the Presbytery of New Brunswick for the privilege of forming a separate congregation and building a church, which according to a 19th-century church historian, was erected at Mount Airy in the same year, presumably on or near the site of⁶ the present church whose adjoining graveyard contains a number of early stones. A later 18th-century deed for a quarter acre lot on the north side of the Old York Road opposite the church (sold by Benjamin Smith to one James Ashton in 1750) indicates that a house was erected upon it between 1750 and 1755 and replaced by another before 1764.⁷ The small size of the lot would have precluded much agricultural activity and suggests that the occupant of the house was engaged in non-agricultural work. He may have been an artisan.

Passenger stage service from Philadelphia to New York was first regularly established along the Old York Road in 1769, and this no doubt was an impetus to the tavern, which according to a 19th-century local informant born in 1789, was operating in house #15 at the time of the Revolutionary War.⁸ John Severns, who acquired the mill property (which included the site of the tavern) from the trustees of Robert Smith in 1760, was granted tavern licenses in 1766, 1767, 1768, and 1770.⁹ It is possible that these were for the tavern at Mount Airy. Although Severns was an Amwell Township resident and landowner, whether or not he ever lived on his property at Mount Airy and operated either the tavern or mill there himself is unclear. While he mortgaged the mill property in 1785, Amwell¹⁰ Township tax ratable lists of the 1780s do not assess him for a grist mill. Most likely, it was rented to one of the several individuals assessed for a mill but not for any land.

Despite 20th-century claims that Samuel Holcombe build the stone storehouse (#16) at Mount Airy in 1743, documentary evidence suggests that the village did not acquire this commercial enterprise until sometime later.¹¹ The 1752

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetMount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 8 Page 4

advertisement made no mention of any store on the premises, but did note that the property was "exceeding well situate for a store," an assertion which was stressed when Smith readvertised the property for sale in the following year.¹² While it may have been erected during John Severn's ownership of the tract, the stone storehouse more likely was built by Samuel Holcombe, Jr. shortly after he purchased a 12-acre corner lot (bounded by the York¹³ and Harbourton Roads) subdivided from the southern end of Severn's property. The son of a neighboring farmer, Samuel Holcombe, Jr. was assessed as a merchant in the Amwell tax ratable lists of 1802 and 1803 and probably operated the store until sometime before 1814 when having moved to New Brunswick he sold the property to his brothers Elisha and Solomon.¹⁴

The remainder of Severn's property, a 32-acre tract on which the mill was located, passed out of his hands sometime between 1785 and 1801 when it was purchased by Josiah Holcombe, a cousin of Samuel Holcombe, Jr.¹⁵ Both Severn's 1785 mortgage and Holcombe's 1801 deed indicate that the mill and its hydrosystem were in their present location by that time. That the mill was converted into or rebuilt as a fulling mill during this period is clear from the 1802 and 1803 tax ratable lists which assessed Josiah Holcombe for 32 acres and a fulling mill.¹⁶

The early 19th-century witnessed other developments in the community. The Presbyterian congregation replaced their original church with a new edifice in 1817, and sometime before 1823 a stone octagonal schoolhouse was erected behind the church on the site of its later 19th-century successor.¹⁷ Around the same time a new tavern (#6) was opened across the road from the old stand. According to a 20th century account, apparently based on family tradition, this occurred upon the acquisition of the storehouse lot by Solomon and Elisha Holcombe in 1814 when the old tavern (which was located on the property) became a private dwelling. Solomon Holcombe occupied the house and ran a general store in the storehouse next door until the late 1860s.¹⁸ Elisha Holcombe and his sister Mary,¹⁹ according to a family genealogy, lived in another house near the church. The village apparently contained only a few other dwellings during this period. A rare circumstance in early 19th-century Hunterdon County was the ownership of one lot, now the site of house #1, by "Prime a free black man," who purchased the half-acre parcel in 1806 for \$25.67.²⁰

The name Mount Airy apparently came into use in the early 19th century. While an 1834 map identified the place as "Amwell," no doubt in reference to its church,²¹ an 1829 road return and deeds of the 1830s refer to the village as Mount Airy.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetMount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 8 Page 5

Throughout the second quarter of the 19th century, Mount Airy evidently experienced little growth. No mention of it was made in Gordon's 1834 Gazeteer of the State of New Jersey, and Barber and Howe's 1844 state history noted only in passing that the place contained a Presbyterian church and a few houses.²² That the place was nevertheless of some local importance is evident from the state legislative act creating West Amwell Township in 1846 which specified that the new municipality's first town meeting was to be held at John Menagh's inn (#6) in Mount Airy.²³

Maps of the next quarter century indicate that the village did not grow during the period, but continued as a small, stable settlement with its present configuration firmly established. The 1851 and 1860 maps depict the upper village as a cluster of houses with a church, school, store, and hotel; a grist mill, blacksmith and wheelwright shops, and a few more dwellings were shown by the creek.²⁴ The village was bypassed when the Flemington Railroad was constructed through the Amwell valley in 1854, and a post office was established under the name of Oak Dale at the new station on the line some miles away.²⁵ The 1873 county atlas reveals little change; although perhaps temporarily closed, neither the store nor gristmill was depicted in it.²⁶ The replacement of both the church and the school in the 1870s with substantial new buildings and especially the church's architectural pretensions attest to at least some local prosperity. The grist mill is said to have been rebuilt in 1876 by James Fackenthal, and the store, if closed, had reopened by 1881 when it was kept by A.P. Holcombe.²⁷

The 1881 county history describes Mount Airy almost exactly as it appeared on the 1850 county map, and since that time no development has occurred except for the construction of several dwellings in this century.²⁸ As the construction of modern roads and the proliferation of automobiles enabled Hunterdon County's rural residents to go elsewhere to work, shop, and play, Mount Airy, like many other small communities in the county, lost most of its local economic functions and declined in importance as a center of local social life. Only two important institutional uses are found there at the present time: the Presbyterian church in the heart of the village, and outside of the district, West Amwell Township's municipal building.

Mount Airy exists today as a largely residential community whose 19th century rural character and setting survive substantially intact. Although non-residential uses in the village have largely disappeared, the buildings that housed them, except for the grist mill and artisan shops, mostly remain. The storehouse and tavern have been converted to residential use, and the farms on

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetMount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 8 Page 6

the outskirts of the village are still in operation, preserving much surrounding open land, despite the increased development pressure of recent years resulting from the state and federal highway construction in the region. Faced with impending change, both township residents and officials have become increasingly aware of the community's special historical and architectural heritage which make it a worthy candidate for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

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2. Schmidt, p. 162.
3. Hunterdon County Deeds, Book 4, page 143; and William Nelson (ed.). Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, First Series, Vol XIX. Extracts From American Newspapers, Relating to New Jersey. Vol. III 1751-55, Paterson, NJ: The Press Printing and Publishing Co., 1897, p. 144.
4. D.H. Morrow (ed.). Traditions of Hunterdon County, Flemington, NJ: D.H. Morrow, 1957, pp. 14, 15, 137.
5. Nelson, p. 144; and A. Van Doren Honeyman (ed.). Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, First Series, Vol XXXII. Calender of New Jersey Wills, Administrations, Etc. Vol. III 1751-60, Somerville, NJ, The Unionist-Gazette Association, Printers, 1924, p. 297.
6. John Backer Kugler, The History of the First Presbyterian Church in Amwell, Somerville, NJ, The Unionist-Gazette Association, 1872, p. 73-74.
7. Hunterdon County Deeds, Book 1/page 271.
8. Schmidt, p. 176; and Morrow, p. 3.
9. Hunterdon County Deeds, Book 4/page 173; and Hunterdon County Tavern Applications, 1738-1800, Vol. III, p. 329-32.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Section number 8 Page 7

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12. Nelson, pp. 144 and 305.
13. Hunterdon County Deeds, Book 4/page 143.
14. Jesse Seaver, The Holcomb(e) Genealogy, Philadelphia, American Historical - Genealogy Society, 1925, p. 123; Amwell Township Tax Ratable Lists, 1802 and 1803; and Hunterdon County Deeds, Book 22/page 410.
15. Hunterdon County Deeds, Book 5/page 42; Hunterdon County Mortgages, Book 1/page 302, and Seaver, p. 85.
16. Amwell Township Tax Ratable Lists, 1802 and 1803.
17. Presbyterian Church corner stone; and James P. Snell, (ed.) History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Everts & Peck, 1881, p. 349-50.
18. Van Sickle, p.p. 51 and 70; and Morrow, p. 3.
19. Seaver, p. 123.
20. Schmidt, pp. 52-53; and Hunterdon County Deeds, Book 12/page 435.
21. Thomas F. Gordon, A Gazeteer of the State of New Jersey, Trenton, Daniel Fenton, 1834, p. 1.
22. John W. Barber, and Henry Howe, Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey, Newark, NJ, Benjamin Olds, 1844, p. 242.
23. Snell, p. 348.
24. S.N. Beers and D.J. Lake, Map of the Vicinity of Philadelphia and Trenton, Philadelphia, C.K. Stone and A. Pomeroy, 1860; and Samuel C. Cornell, Map of Hunterdon County, New Jersey, Philadelphia, S.C. Cornell and Lloyd Vanderveer, 1851.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Section number 8 Page 8

25. Snell, pp. 115-16.
26. F.W. Beers, County Atlas of Hunterdon, New Jersey, New York: F.W. Beers & Co., 1873, p. 67.
27. Report to the Taxpayers of West Amwell Township, West Amwell Township Committee, 1963, p. 13; Snell, p. 349.
28. Snell, p. 349.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2 Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Section number 9 Page 3

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Section number 9 Page 4

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Hunterdon County Mortgage Books
Hunterdon County Road Returns
Hunterdon County Will Books

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Population Schedules, West Amwell Township, 1850-1880
Industrial Schedules, West Amwell Township, 1850-1880

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJSection number 10 Page 2

Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

The boundary of the Mount Airy Historic District is delineated on the attached map entitled "Mount Airy Historic District Site Location and Boundary Map", and is verbally described and justified in the following paragraphs. The site and boundary map is a composite of West Amwell Township tax maps, sheets 3, 5 & 6.

Beginning at the northeast corner of Block 13, Lot 1, which point is on the south side of State Route 179, the district boundary runs southwest along the south side of the highway to the northwest corner of Lot 3. Turning north it cuts across the highway to the southeast corner of Block 7.01, Lot 12 and then proceeds north, west, and south along the east, north, and west sides of that lot to County Route 605. The boundary then proceeds east along the north side of Route 605 to the east corner of intersection of that road and Route 179, which point is also the south corner of Lot 12. From there it cuts across Route 179 to the west corner of the intersection of Route 179 and County Route 603, also the east corner of Block 10, Lot 9, and continues southwest along the south side of Route 179 to the northwest corner of Block 10, Lot 1, also the intersection of the highway with a short unnamed road. It then turns south along the east side of the short road, also the west side of Lot 1, to the east corner of the intersection of the short road with Route 603, also the south corner of Lot 1.

The district boundary next cuts across Route 603 and turning west runs along the south side of Route 603 to the northeast corner of Block 11, Lot 37. From that point, it proceeds south along the east side of Lot 37 to the southeast corner of that lot, and turning east runs in a straight line across Block 11, Lot 5 to a corner on the east side of Lot 5 approximately 840 feet south of Route 603. It then turns north along the east side of Lot 5 to another corner on the east side of that lot approximately 725 feet from Route 603. It next cuts across Block 11, Lot 9 to the southeast corner of Block 11, Lot 8 and proceeds east along the south side of Lot 8 to County Route 601.

The district boundary then cuts across Route 601 and turning southeast runs along the north side of the road, also the south side of Block 13, Lot 1, to a bend in the road, where it continues southeast along the south side of Lot 1 a short distance to the south corner of that lot. The boundary then turns north-east across Block 13, Lot 1.01, crossing Alexauken Creek to the southwest corner of Block 13, Lot 6. Turning north, it follows the eastern side of Lot 1.01 to the southeast corner of Block 13, Lot 3, from which point it proceeds north along the east side of Lot 3 to the place of beginning.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Section number 10 Page 3

The boundaries of the Mount Airy Historic District were delineated to include to the greatest extent possible, the architectural and historical resources of the village, with not only the fewest non-contributing buildings but also with sufficient amounts of visually and historically critical open space.

On the north and west sides of the district, Route 179 with its modern buildings provided an obvious boundary for the district, except at the north end where the boundary jogs northward to include the lot of the old church parsonage (#10) and at the south end where it jogs eastward to exclude the modern township municipal building. On the south and east sides of the district the boundary was delineated to encompass a sufficient amount of the open farm land appurtenant to the two farmsteads (#s 15 & 22) which are visually and historically linked to the village and critical to the rural character of its setting, and also to include the entire hydrosystem of the mill once powered by Alexauken Creek. The line was also drawn in this area to exclude the scattering of non-contributing older houses and modern dwellings found there.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Mount Airy HD, West Amwell
Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

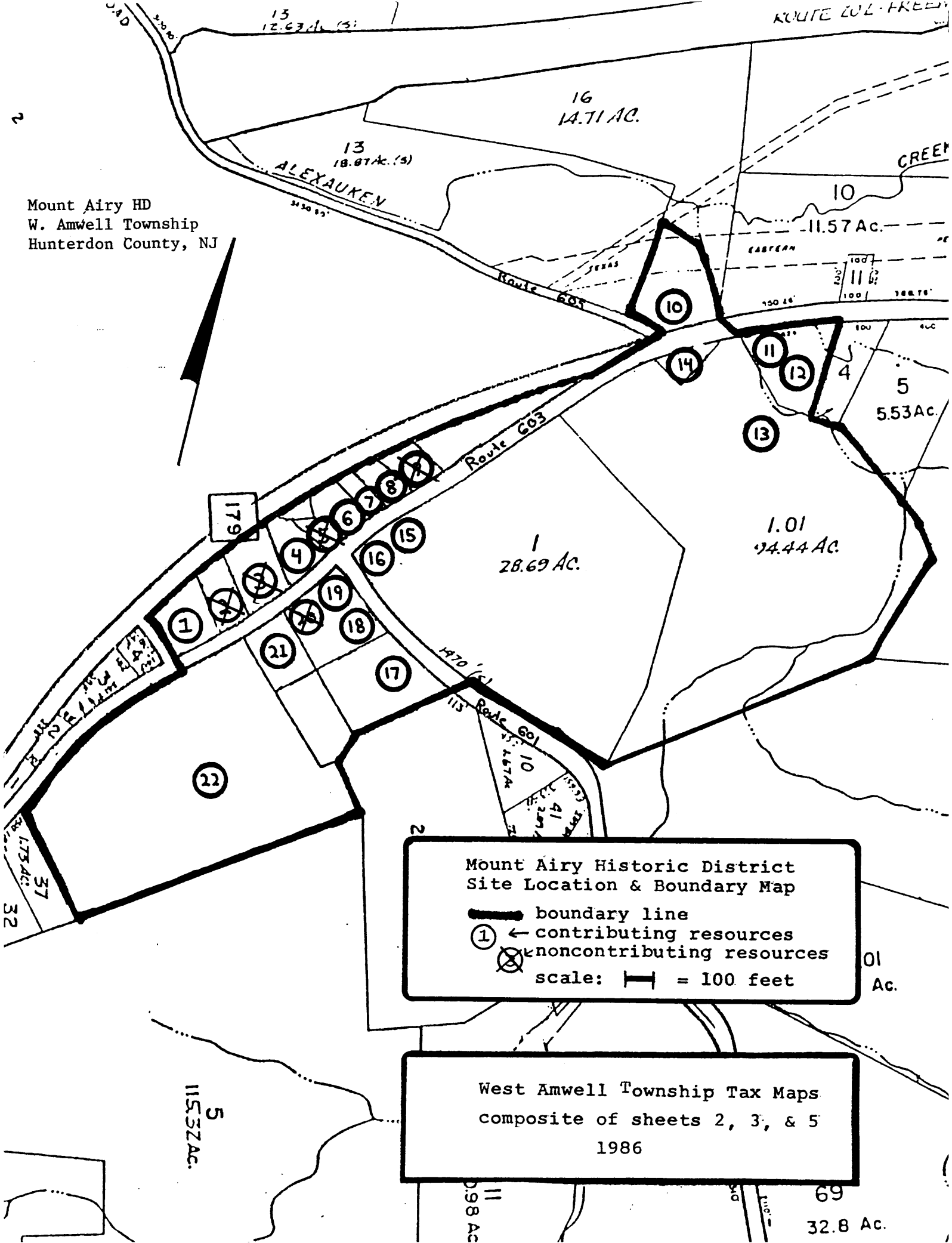
Section number P Page 1

Photographic Identification:

The following information is the same for all of the photographs submitted with the nomination:

Name:	Mount Airy Historic District
Location:	West Amwell Township, Hunterdon County, NJ
Photographer:	Dennis Bertland
Date of photographs:	April 1988
Negative repository:	Bertland Associates, Box 11, Port Murray, NJ 07865

Mount Airy HD
W. Amwell Township
Hunterdon County, NJ



Mount Airy Historic District
Site Location & Boundary Map

- boundary line
- ① ← contributing resources
- ⊗ noncontributing resources

scale: = 100 feet

West Amwell Township Tax Maps
composite of sheets 2, 3, & 5
1986

