

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Gruber Wagon Works

AND/OR COMMON

Gruber Wagon Works

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER On Red Covered Bridge Road in  
Tulpehocken Creek Park

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF Reading

6

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Pennsylvania

42

Berks

011

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY** Contact also: William W. Semmel, Dir.;  
Berks Co. Parks & Recreation; Box 272, R.D. 5;  
Sinking Spring, Pa., 19608

NAME

Berks County; Berks County Board of Commissioners

STREET & NUMBER

Sixth and Court Street

CITY, TOWN

Reading

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Pennsylvania 19601

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Recorder of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Berks County Courthouse, Sixth & Court Streets

CITY, TOWN

Reading

STATE

Pennsylvania

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE National Register of Historic Places  
Special HAER-U.S. Army Corps of Engrs. Study

DATE

1972; 1974-76

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

710

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

National Register; Phil. District Corps of Engrs.

CITY, TOWN

Washington; Philadelphia

STATE

D.C.; Pa.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE <u>1976-77</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

When constructed by Franklin H. Gruber in 1882, the Gruber Wagon Works was situated in Pleasant Valley on Licking Creek, a tributary of Tulpehocken Creek. The factory remained there 94 years, until 1976, undisturbed and unaltered except as a result of modifications made by the Grubers. Franklin Gruber's descendants stopped manufacturing wagons in the 1950's but continued to make wagon repairs in the factory until 1972. By that time the wagon works, which still had all its original tools and machinery plus a supply of building materials, had been recognized as a unique intact example of an important 19th-century American industry and had been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The factory's future was clouded, however, by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Blue Marsh Lake project, which called for impounding Tulpehocken Creek and flooding 2200 acres, including the site of the wagon works.

Fortunately, after 1974, the Moss-Bennett Act made it possible for Federal agencies to spend up to 1 percent of a project's funds for the survey and recovery of historical, archeological, or paleontological material, and so the Corps developed plans to dismantle the wagon works and move it some 5 miles east to a similar but safer setting. An independent contractor, National Heritage Corporation of West Chester, Pa., carried out the relocation in late 1976 and early 1977. The new location resembles the old one, as the factory sits near the north bank of the Tulpehocken and near the now abandoned Union Canal and the Red Covered Bridge, an 1867 edifice that is the longest extant single span bridge in Pennsylvania. The building, which was moved in sections, has now been reassembled, and restorative work is proceeding. Eventually all tools, machines, and building materials will be put back in their proper places, just as the Grubers left them. When this task is completed, ownership of the factory, which rests now with the Corps, will be transferred to Berks County, which owns the new site, and the factory will be maintained as a historical museum. It will form a portion of the 5-mile-long Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park, which includes the Red Covered Bridge, a portion of the Union Canal that may be restored, and the Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail (a National Recreation Trail).

The wagon works is a 2 1/2-story, cross-shaped, gable-roofed, frame structure that consisted originally of a single rectangular 2 1/2-story main block and a small ell. In 1905-6 the Grubers added a 2 1/2-story ell to the northwest (front) of the building to house a hand-operated elevator and a painting

799

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1882-1950

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Franklin P. Gruber

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Until the automobile came into widespread use early in the 20th century, wagons, carriages, and horse-cars represented the most common forms of land-based vehicular transportation in the United States. Not even railroads surpassed them. In fact, according to historian Richard Hegel, "the new wealth created by the railroads stimulated rather than depressed the [carriage-building] industry."<sup>1</sup> Meeting this demand required the output of both large manufacturing firms like Studebaker and small rural factories like the Gruber Wagon Works, each of which outstandingly represented its particular facet of the wagon-and-carriage-building industry.

Situated in the vicinity of Pennsylvania's famous Conestoga wagon-making region, the family-owned-and-operated Gruber factory produced both standard farm wagons and custom vehicles from 1882 until the 1950's. Today it endures in a state of almost complete preservation, including machinery, tools, and materials, and is the foremost extant example of what was once an essential American industry. "'Extraordinary does not say it,'" declares Robert M. Vogel, Curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of History and Technology. "'While there are a number of small 19th century factories in the United States that survive with their machinery and other equipment intact, I know of no other where this is true to the extent that it is at Gruber's . . . (It) is nothing less than a three-dimensional document of one particular American industry, fixed within a particular, narrow time frame.'"<sup>2</sup>

The Gruber factory is a 2 1/2-story, cross-shaped, frame building that in 1972, when the Grubers ceased using it as a wagon-repair facility, faced a future clouded by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plans to create Blue Marsh Lake. When that

(continued)

<sup>1</sup>Richard Hegel, Carriages from New Haven: New Haven's Nineteenth-Century Carriage Industry (Hamden, Conn., 1974), 6.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in James Kahn, "History Takes a Step Forward," Water Spectrum, VII (Fall, 1975), 40.

(795)

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dunbar, Seymour, A History of Travel in America (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1937).

Hegel, Richard, Carriages from New Haven: New Haven's Nineteenth-Century Carriage Industry (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1974).

(continued)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY circa 12 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>18</u>	<u>416730</u>	<u>4469180</u>	B	<u>18</u>	<u>416910</u>	<u>4469220</u>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	<u>18</u>	<u>417020</u>	<u>4469080</u>	D	<u>18</u>	<u>416800</u>	<u>4468950</u>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See last page of description.)

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

George R. Adams, Director, Historic Landmarks Project

ORGANIZATION

DATE

American Association for State and Local History June 1977

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1400 Eighth Avenue South

615/242-5583

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Nashville

Tennessee 37203

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

807

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CONTINUATION SHEET Gruber Wagon ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE one

and drying division. The factory rests on a stone-rubble foundation, has a partial basement, features slate shingle roofing, and is lighted by six-over-six sash windows symmetrically placed. A pair of red brick interior chimneys pierce the roof crest; one is near each end of the elongated section.

Facing northwest and oriented northeast to southwest, just as on its original site, the factory includes several departments. There is a blacksmith shop, wood shop, bench shop, and painting area, all of which are fully equipped. Either on the first floor or destined to be returned to it when restoration is completed are a forge, a spoke tenoning machine, a hub boring device, a mortising apparatus, and various saws, shapers, sanders, and other implements. Most of these are belt driven from an overhead drive system powered by a 1906 Otto gasoline engine. Also downstairs are several tool-laden work benches and a small office that is set in an original octagonal bay along the southeast wall. The second floor contains the apparatus of the paint department, while the third holds various supplies and spare parts. The three floors are connected by the 1905-6 hand-operated elevator which moved wagons and parts along a vertical assembly line.

Restoration plans for the Gruber Wagon Works also include the original outhouse and iron storage shed. The former will be situated rear of the factory and the latter will be positioned southwest of the works.

Boundary Justification. Included within the boundary of the nominated property are the main building of the Gruber Wagon Works, its two outbuildings, and approximately 12 acres. On the north side of the nominated property the boundary corresponds with the county property line; on the west it parallels the county property line and Red Bridge Road; on the south it parallels the county property line and Tulpehocken Creek; and on the east it begins at a bend in Tulpehocken Creek and extends north along a plane roughly parallel with the west boundary.

(continued)

800

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CONTINUATION SHEET Gruber Wagon ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE TWO

Boundary Description. As indicated in red on the accompanying maps [(1) U.S.G.S. 7.5' Series, Pa., Reading Quad., 1956, photorevised 1968; and (2) AASLH Sketch Map, 1977], a line beginning at a railroad spike on the east side of Red Covered Bridge Road about 770 feet north of the north bank of Tulpehocken Creek and extending south along N. 8° 28' W. a distance of 148.54 feet to a spike; thence, south along N. 15° 24' W. a distance of 242.77 feet to a spike; thence, south along N. 21° 57' 20" W. a distance of 221.34 feet to a spike; thence, south in a direct line approximately 150 feet to a point of the north bank of Tulpehocken Creek immediately underneath the east side of Red Covered Bridge; thence, east approximately 800 feet to an unmarked point on the north bank of Tulpehocken Creek where said creek bends sharply to the south; thence northwestward approximately 650 feet in a direct line to a marble stone planted December 1972; thence, west along N. 51° 07' 50" E. a distance of 78.18 feet to a marble stone; thence west along N. 70° 57' E. a distance of 466.22 feet to the point of beginning.

Continuation Sheet Gruber Wagon Works Item No. 9 Page one

Kahn, James, "History Takes a Step Forward," Water Spectrum, VII (Fall, 1975), 39-45.

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Gruber Wagon Works National Register Inventory-Nomination Form, 1972.

Shumway, George, and Edward Durell and Howard C. Frey, Conestoga Wagon, 1750-1850: Freight Carrier for 100 Years of America's Westward Expansion, 2d edition (York, Pa.: George Shumway, 1966).

Taylor, George Rogers, The Transportation Revolution (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1951).

801

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CONTINUATION SHEET Gruber Wagon ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE one

flood-control project was completed, water from impounded Tulpehocken Creek would inundate the factory and its surroundings. Under the Moss-Bennett Act of 1974, however, the Corps arranged for relocation and restoration of the historic wagon works in a similar setting only 5 miles east of the original site. Workmen completed the move in 1976 and the reassembly in 1977. Currently restoration is nearing completion.

History

Until the onset of the automobile early in the 20th century, wagons, carriages, and horse-carts were essential modes of over-land transportation in the United States. During most of the colonial period, for example, horses and wagons provided Americans their only common means of nonpedestrian travel. According to George Shumway, an expert on the history of Conestoga wagons, some colonists brought wagons from Europe, but gradually colonial artisans began fabricating them here. One of the first American wagon-making centers evolved in eastern Pennsylvania's Conestoga Valley, where sturdy vehicles were manufactured to move goods from Philadelphia to Lancaster and beyond. Although the oldest known curved-bottom Conestoga-type wagons date from the early 1800's, Shumway speculates that Lancaster County craftsmen began making them during the first half of the 18th century.<sup>3</sup> Not many fancy vehicles--coaches and carriages--were in use until after the Revolution, when rapid development of roads and turnpikes sparked a parallel increase in stagecoach travel. The growth of railroads after about 1830 provided a whole new method of travel, but contrary to what many people expected, "the railroads," says historian Richard Hegel, "stimulated rather than depressed the [carriage-building] industry." Later the Civil War boosted it further. Because of the government's need for wagons, "quite a number of new wagon building firms sprang up." Moreover, "the quick populating of the west after the War added further opportunities for the trade."<sup>4</sup> Even after completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, wagons continued for many years to be a chief means of moving people and things into and across that vast region.

(continued)

<sup>3</sup>George Shumway, Edward Durell, and Howard C. Frey, Conestoga Wagon, 1750-1850: Freight Carrier for 100 Years of America's Westward Expansion, 2d edition (York, Pa., 1966), 14.

<sup>4</sup>Hegel, Carriages from New Haven, 6-7.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Gruber Wagon ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE two

Meeting this demand for wagons, carriages, and similar vehicles required the output of both large manufacturing firms like Studebaker and small rural factories like the Gruber Wagon Works, each of which outstandingly represented its particular facet of the wagon-and-carriage-building industry. Situated west of Reading, Pa., on a small tributary of Tulpehocken Creek, the family-owned-and-operated Gruber factory produced both standard farm wagons and custom vehicles from 1882 until the 1950's. Today, although moved to a new site about five miles distant from its original location but still near the Tulpehocken, the factory endures in a state of almost complete preservation, including machinery, tools, and materials, and is the foremost extant example of what was once an essential American industry. "'Extraordinary does not say it,'" declares Robert M. Vogel, Curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of History and Technology. "'While there are a number of small 19th century factories in the United States that survive with their machinery and other equipment intact, I know of no other where this is true to the extent that it is at Gruber's . . . (It) is nothing less than a three-dimensional document of one particular American industry, fixed within a particular, narrow time frame.'"<sup>5</sup>

Franklin H. Gruber founded the Gruber Wagon Works and with his four sons built wagons initially by hand, using axes, saws, frows, drills, and other implements. Eventually a simple horse-drawn turnstile and later a small water wheel provided some power. Over the years the Grubers established a reputation for fine craftsmanship, and their business grew steadily until they were selling farm wagons as far away as Ohio and Indiana. Part of the Grubers' success stemmed from their willingness to adopt new machinery as it became available. If they could not afford to buy a particular piece of equipment, they designed and made it themselves, and in time band saws, lathes, and power sanders speeded their manufacturing process. Between 1896 and 1906 a steam engine drove the Gruber machinery by means of an overhead belt system, and after 1906 an Otto gasoline engine with a 7-inch piston and a pair of 5-foot flywheels drove the equipment.

(continued)

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Kahn, "History Takes a Step Forward," 40.



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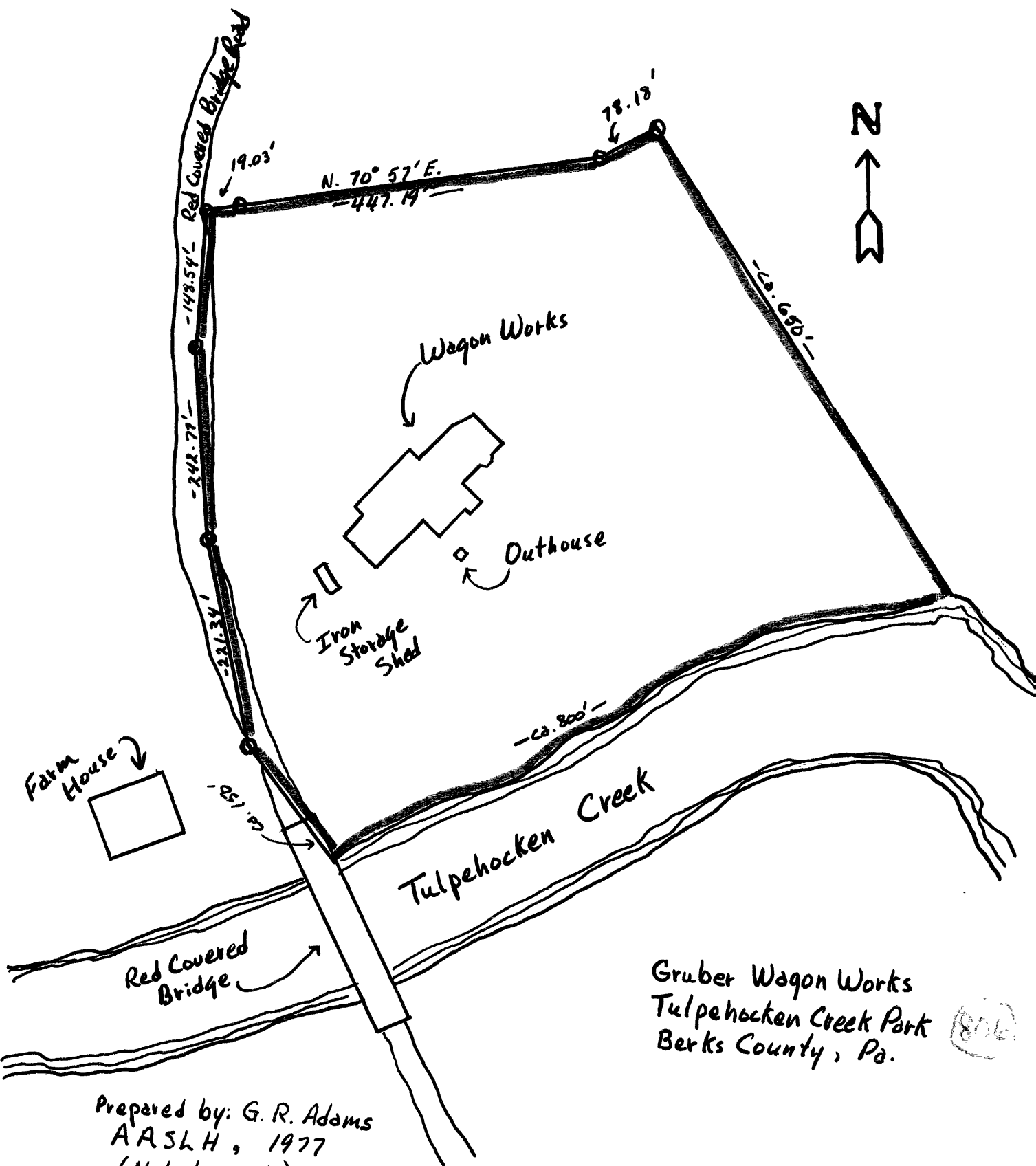
DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Gruber Wagon ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE three

In 1908 the Grubers added a West tire setter. It drew power from a hydraulic pump and set unheated metal rims on wagon wheels. Apparently at first this machine created concern among some customers who believed there was no satisfactory substitute for firing rims and setting them by hand.

The Gruber Wagon Works reached peak production during the 1920's, when it employed 20 men 6 days a week and turned out about 100 vehicles each year. After the Grubers shut down the manufacturing operation in the 1950's, some family members continued to use the factory for repair work until 1972. Through the years the Grubers added to their facility, as in 1905 then they appended a hand-operated elevator and shed, but when they stopped work completely in the seventies, the main block of the building remained essentially unchanged. Moreover all the tools, machinery, and materials that the family had accumulated since 1882 lay intact, waiting to be put to use again.

A year before the Grubers closed the factory it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, but its future was clouded by a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood-control project that called for impounding Tulpehocken Creek and flooding 2200 acres, including the site of the wagon works. After 1974, however, when the Moss-Bennett Act made it possible for Federal agencies to spend up to 1 percent of a project's funds for the survey and recovery of historical, archeological, or paleontological material, the Corps developed plans to dismantle the wagon works and move it some 5 miles east to a similar but safer setting. An independent contractor carried out the relocation in late 1976 and early 1977. The factory building, which was moved in sections, has now been reassembled, and restorative work is proceeding. Eventually all tools, machines, and building materials will be put back in their proper places, just as the Grubers left them. When this task is completed, ownership of the factory, which rests now with the Corps, will be transferred to Berks County, which owns the new site, and the factory will be maintained as a historical museum.



Gruber Wagon Works  
 Tulpehocken Creek Park  
 Berks County, Pa.

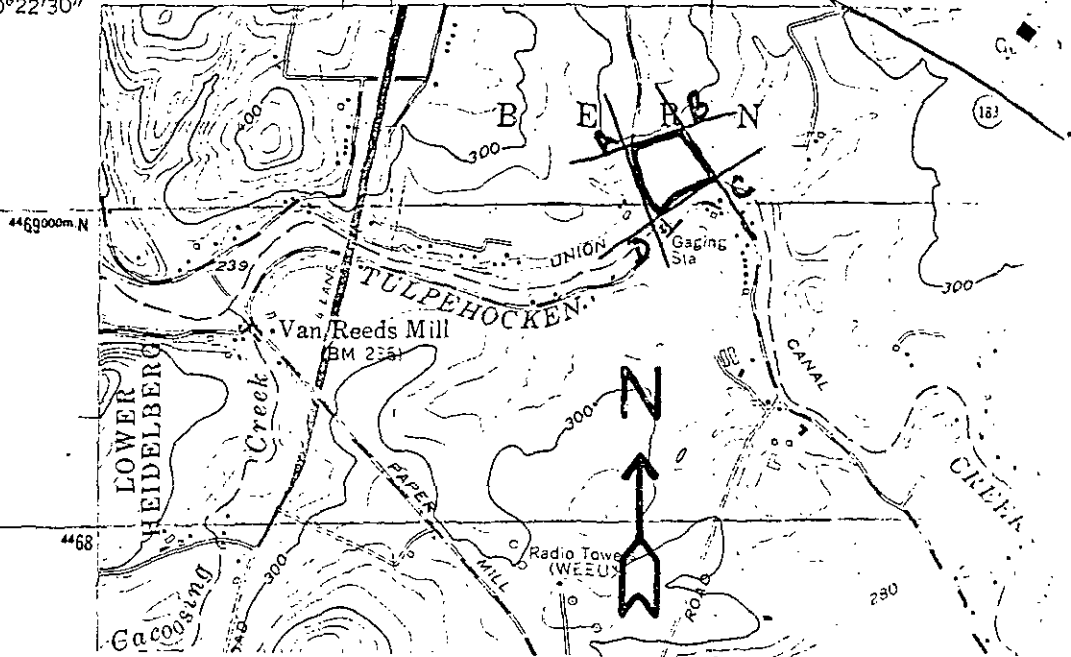
806

Prepared by: G. R. Adams  
 AASH, 1977  
 (Not to scale)

5764 1 NE  
(BERNVILLE)

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

76°00'      416000m E      BERNVILLE 8.9 MI.  
40°22'30"      PLEASANT VALLEY 5.3 MI.



Gruber Wagon Works  
Tulpehocken Creek Park  
Berks County, Pa.

U.S.G.S. 7.5' Series  
Pa.; Reading Quad.  
1956; photorevised 1966  
Zone 18

A: E. 416,730 N. 4,469,180  
B: E. 416,910 N. 4,469,220  
C: E. 417,020 N. 4,469,080  
D: E. 416,800 N. 4,468,950

