

OCT 12 1988

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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 Stearns Administrative and Commercial District  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number Central Business District NA  not for publication  
city, town Stearns NA  vicinity  
state Kentucky code KY county McCreary code 147 zip code 42647

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>6</u>	<u>1</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.

David C. Morgan \_\_\_\_\_ 10-4-88  
Signature of certifying official Date  
State Historic Preservation Officer, Commonwealth of Kentucky

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:) \_\_\_\_\_

Patrick Andrews \_\_\_\_\_ 11/16/88  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Commerce	Business
	Specialty Store
	Restaurant
Social	Meeting Hall
Recreation & Culture	Theatre

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Commerce	Business
	Specialty Store
	Restaurant
	Warehouse

**7. Description**Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation	Concrete
walls	Weatherboard
roof	Asphalt
other	

**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

See building inventory at bottom of continuation sheet 7.2.

The Stearns Administrative and Commercial Historic District consists of six contributing and one non-contributing building located in the center of Stearns, an unincorporated, former company town located in south central McCreary County, Kentucky. McCreary County is located in southeastern Kentucky and is part of the Appalachian Mountains Cultural Landscape. Bordered on the south by Tennessee and on the north, west and east by the Cumberland River and its largest fork, McCreary County is characterized by rugged, low-elevation mountainous terrain most of which remains in a forested state. Located above the head of navigation on the Cumberland River, the area remained isolated and undeveloped until the construction of the main north/south line of the Cincinnati & Southern Railroad in the 1880s. Stearns is located 190 miles south of Cincinnati and 155 miles north of Chattanooga--the terminal points of the initial Cincinnati and Southern Railroad. Stearns is also located on U.S. 27, a north/south highway which parallels the railroad across Kentucky and Tennessee from Cincinnati to New Orleans and three miles south of the county seat, Whitley City.

The community of Stearns is located on low hills next to a wide valley where the Kentucky and Tennessee Railroad, which provided access to the 200 square-mile empire of the Stearns Coal and Lumber Company, joined the Cincinnati and Southern. The Administrative and Commercial Buildings of Stearns adjoined the rail yards, power plant, and lumber mills which were the focal areas of the community. Residential areas were built by the company on the low hills north and west of the commercial center.

The focal building of Stearns and this historic district is the Stearns Company General Offices Building (see photos 1 - 4). The General Offices Building is a two-and one-half story frame building that utilizes dormers, porches, and roof lines characteristic of the American Four Square House. Built shortly after the Stearns Company came to the area, the Administration Building contained the central financial and administrative offices for the Stearns empire. The first floor with its wide surrounding porches on three sides was where financial and employment services were provided. It is designed for public access and contains long counters in the two main rooms which separated company clerks from the employees and public.

The second floor is divided into individual offices off a long corridor and the third floor contained larger meeting rooms and offices. The building is utilitarian in design with plain window and door trim. All windows are six-over-six, double-hung standard windows from the period. The fenestration is irregular reflecting the width of the interior offices.

**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)

Community Planning and Development

Commerce

Period of Significance

1903-1939

Significant Dates

1903, 1907,

1928, 1939

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

The Stearns Administrative and Commercial District is significant at the local level under Criterion A in relation to the themes of community planning and development and commerce during the period 1903-1938.

The Stearns Coal and Lumber Company was one of the largest corporate extractive industries in East Kentucky during the first half of the twentieth century. Lumbering operations were the primary economic force in late 19th century East Kentucky as railroads and towns were built to allow the harvesting of timber needed to build the industrial cities of the Midwest. Coal mining supplanted lumbering in the early 20th century as the tremendous coal reserves of the region were made accessible to the industrial economy. The Stearns Company was almost unique among the extractive companies with its combined interest in timber and coal. This was made possible by the extreme isolation and resultant late exploitation of the mountainous region along the Kentucky-Tennessee border.

The Stearns Company began purchasing timber rights in Pulaski, Wayne and Whitley Counties in 1903 as its timber supply in the Upper Midwest neared depletion. With home offices in Luddington, Michigan, where it operated a large lumber mill, the company purchased large timber reserves and mineral rights along the Southern Railroad in Eastern Whitley County beginning in 1903. Within a few years, it built a technologically advanced planing mill, an electric generating plant to supply it, and began to build a railroad into the rugged lands along the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River. The town where all of this activity was focused was named Stearns.

Over the next twenty years, the Stearns Company created an extensive company-owned town with a commercial center, company offices, a hotel, a school system, a golf course, mill, and railroad yard. Within a few years of its arrival in Kentucky, the economic power of the Stearns Company allowed it to dominate the local political system. The Stearns Company failed to prevent the formation of McCreary County, Kentucky's last, in 1912 but it was able to influence the new county most effectively. It defeated a major effort to organize its miners in 1908 and again in 1922-23. By providing the best housing and services in the region and some of the safest mining operations, it had little trouble in sustaining a captive union until the United Mine Workers successfully organized the Stearns Company Mines in the late 1930s. During the late 1920s, the Stearns Company was second only to the U.S. Steel Mine at Lynch in terms of total production.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

McCreary County Public Library, McCreary County: A Pictorial History - The Early Years, 1980.  
McCreary Heritage, Inc., Vertical and Photographic Files, Stearns, Kentucky.  
Perry, L. E., McCreary Conquest, A Narrative History; L. E. Perry, Whitley City, KY, 1979.  
Stearns Coal and Lumber Company, Forty Years of Industry, The Stearns Company, Stearns, KY, 1941.  
Stearns Interest, The, The Stearns Co-Operator, Vol. II., Sept. 1, 1916, The Stearns Company, Stearns, KY.  
Thomas, Dr. Frank, Personal Interview, June 10, 1988.  
Upper Cumberland Institute, The Stearns Company, Tennessee Tech University, Cookeville, Tennessee, 1988.

See continuation sheet

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property 4.25

UTM References

A 

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

C 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

B 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is shown on the attached Property Identification Map--McCreary Map 106-3 (1986) (Stearns) which also provides the boundary of the Stearns Administration Building from Map 105-4 as transposed by Kentucky Department of Revenue staff.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification The boundary includes the three lots containing the nominated properties and the street which separates them. To the north, residential buildings have been extensively altered and do not retain sufficient integrity to be nominated. To the west and south are commercial buildings less than 50 years old which are not associated with the Stearns Company. On the east is the Southern Railroad which was excluded due to extensive changes made in recent years including the demolition of the passenger station and the realignment of switches and tracks within the yards.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title	Robert M. Polsgrove, Historic Sites Program Manager	date	August 1988
organization	Kentucky Heritage Council	telephone	502/564-7005
street & number	Capital Plaza Tower, 12th Floor	state	KY
city or town	Frankfort	zip code	40601

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The most interesting feature of the building is the nine-bay, one-story porch which is articulated by ten tuscan columns. Approached from a flight of wide steps which are in turn reached from a flight of concrete steps and long sloping walk, the Administration Building effectively symbolized the civic and authority and economic power of the Stearns Coal and Lumber Company. Today, the building remains much as it was during the heyday of Stearns. Some offices have been paneled with modern paneling and the original clapboarding has been replaced with Masonite siding of the same width and shape, and some bays on either side porch have been enclosed, but the overall appearance of the building and its main public spaces remain unaltered from the period of significance. (Contributing)

Across the street on a slightly lower elevation, is the Stearns Commercial area (see photo 5). A gigantic historic neon sign which runs the length of the roof of the largest building clearly labels the area: "Stearns Coal and Lumber Company, Founded in 1902 by Justus S. Stearns, Whose Memory We Honor." The sign was constructed in 1937 atop the two-story Company Store which was constructed in 1928. The facade of the temple form store is divided into three identical two-story bays articulated by Corinthian pilasters. The pediment features a large tympanum. Originally, the first floor had a central recessed entrance with large plate glass show windows in the bays on either side. Luxor glass transoms were located above. In recent years, the transoms have been covered and modern metal sash glass doors have been installed in the central bay. The first floor interior has been extensively altered, including the installation of a dropped accoustical tile ceiling. The second floor windows have been removed on the street side and covered on the sides; however, the large open meeting room gymnasium remains essentially unchanged on the second floor. The second floor is no longer in use. At the same time, the full basement, which is accessed at grade from the rear, is fully used by the Outdoor Ventures Corporation in its manufacturing operation (see photo 6). (Contributing)

On either side of the dominating company store building are smaller, less pretentious commercial buildings all of which were built or moved to their current site by the Stearns Company. To the right of the company store is the Stearns Confectionary Building constructed in 1928 (see photo 5). The simple facade of this one-story building is relatively unchanged while the west elevation has been completely remodeled in recent years. The original soda fountain featuring a marble counter and an elaborate mirror and carved woodwork area remains on the left side of the interior while modern restaurant tables, booths, and chairs have been installed in the balance of the area. (Contributing)

Immediately behind the Confectionary/Restaurant is the Stearns Theatre Building. Originally located on the current site of the Confectionary, it was moved in 1928. Although the stage and drops have been retained, the balances of the interior and the exterior have been extensively remodeled in recent years to serve as an office for the National Park Service's Big South Fork National Recreation Area operation. (Non-contributing)

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To the left of the Company Store are two low commercial buildings (see photo 7). The two-story frame gable end, commercial building was constructed across the street in 1910 and moved to this site in 1939. A two-story addition on the right side was also moved in 1939. The building houses the post office and a barber shop and continues in residential use on the second floor. (Contributing)

Linking the Company Store building with these two-story commercial buildings is a one-story commercial building built in 1939. It balances the Confectionary Building in regard to height and width. Although extensive changes have been made to the facade, overall, it retains sufficient integrity of design and feeling to continue to contribute to the overall historicity of the area. All three buildings have been extensively remodeled on the interior. (Contributing)

The last building in the district is the plain two-story storage and freight warehouse building which served as the original administration building in Stearns. Located immediately east of the post office and adjacent to the Southern Railroad tracks, this plain rambling (see photos 8 & 9), two-story frame building with a one-story addition built in 1903 and served as company headquarters until the Administration Building was completed in 1907. The main block is open on the interior, as is the long one-story freight warehouse addition. Both have been adapted as manufacturing and processing space by the manufacturing company which owns them. Tongue and groove walls and ceilings are found throughout as well as wide heavy board floors, characteristic of warehouse space. Although (see photo 9) the east elevation of the freight warehouse has been covered with corrugated metal siding, this entire building retains a high degree of integrity of materials, workmanship, design, and feeling and place. (Contributing)

As a group, the Administrative and Commercial Buildings at Stearns effectively communicate the sense of time and place associated with company towns, and the industrial era during which they thrived.

Inventory of district resources

- Stearns Company General Offices Building -- Contributing
- Company Store -- Contributing
- Stearns Confectionary Building -- Contributing
- Stearns Theater Building -- Noncontributing
- Commercial Building (currently Post office and Barber shop) -- Contributing
- One Story Commercial Building -- Contributing
- Freight Warehouse Building -- Contributing

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The community of Stearns was the nerve center of a 200 square-mile empire located in McCreary and Wayne Counties, Kentucky, and Fentress and Pickett Counties, Tennessee. This lumber and coal mining empire continued to expand and develop until the end of World War II as numerous company-owned towns were constructed at mines along the company owned railroad, the Kentucky and Tennessee Railroad, which linked the various elements together. The National Park Service has recognized the significance of this by restoring the last large mining operation established by the company--the Blue Heron Mine--as an interpretative center within the Big South Fork National Recreation Area.

It is as the administrative, commercial and transportation center of the Stearns Company operation that the Stearns Administrative and Commercial District derives its significance. The scale of the Administrative Building and the grandeur of the Company Store with its massive neon sign effectively communicated for seventy years the powerful presence of the Stearns Company.

During the 1970s the Stearns empire was dismantled. Most of its timber and coal reserves were sold to the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service. The Justus Mine, its last, was sold to the Blue Diamond Coal Company. The K & T Railroad was sold to the Railum Corporation which continues to be housed in the Stearns Administration Building. Company-owned housing was comprehensively modernized prior to being sold to individuals, the commercial buildings were sold as a group and remain under single ownership, and the freight warehouse was adopted to a small manufacturing operation.

Fortunately, there remains a strong commitment to the preservation of Stearns among the people of McCreary County. Stearns is the primary point of entry in Kentucky into the Big South Fork National Recreation Area and has the potential to attract increasing numbers of tourists as facilities in the Park are completed and opened to the public. The McCreary Heritage Foundation, a non-profit group has been formed with the goal of creating a museum in the Administration Building. The owner of the Commercial Block has made major improvements in recent years and remains committed to maintaining the Stearns Company sign. The museum and the commercial buildings promise to provide an effective link with the Stearns Company era for many years to come.

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**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

**NRIS Reference Number:** 88002528

**Date Listed:** 11/16/88

Stern's Admin. and Commercial Dist.  
**Property Name**

McCreary  
**County**

KY  
**State**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Multiple Name**

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrew  
**Signature of the Keeper**

11/16/88  
**Date of Action**

=====  
**Amended Items in Nomination:**

Criterion C was checked on the form, but no corresponding area of significance was selected and the form makes no argument for architectural significance. Marty Perry with the KY SHPO says that checking C was an oversight. The form is now amended to drop Criterion C.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

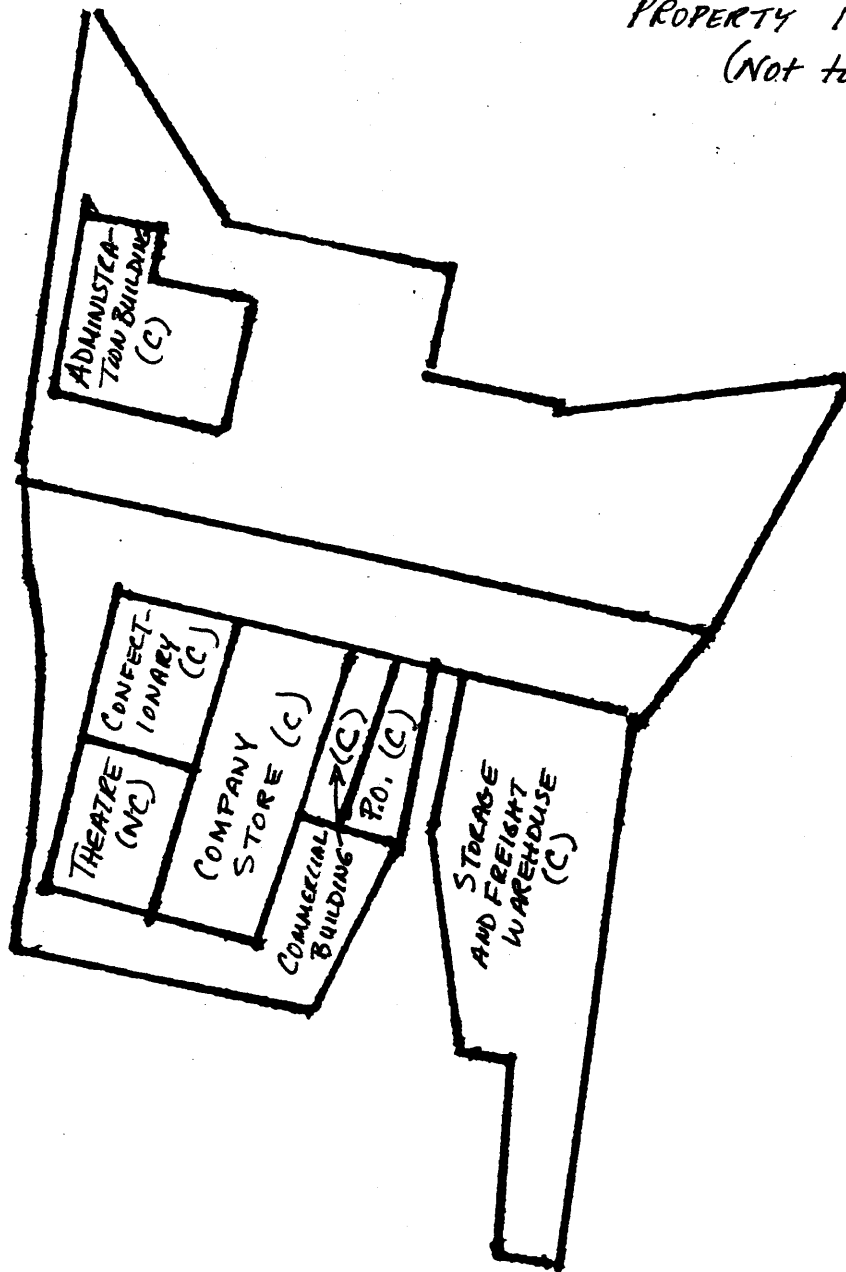
- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

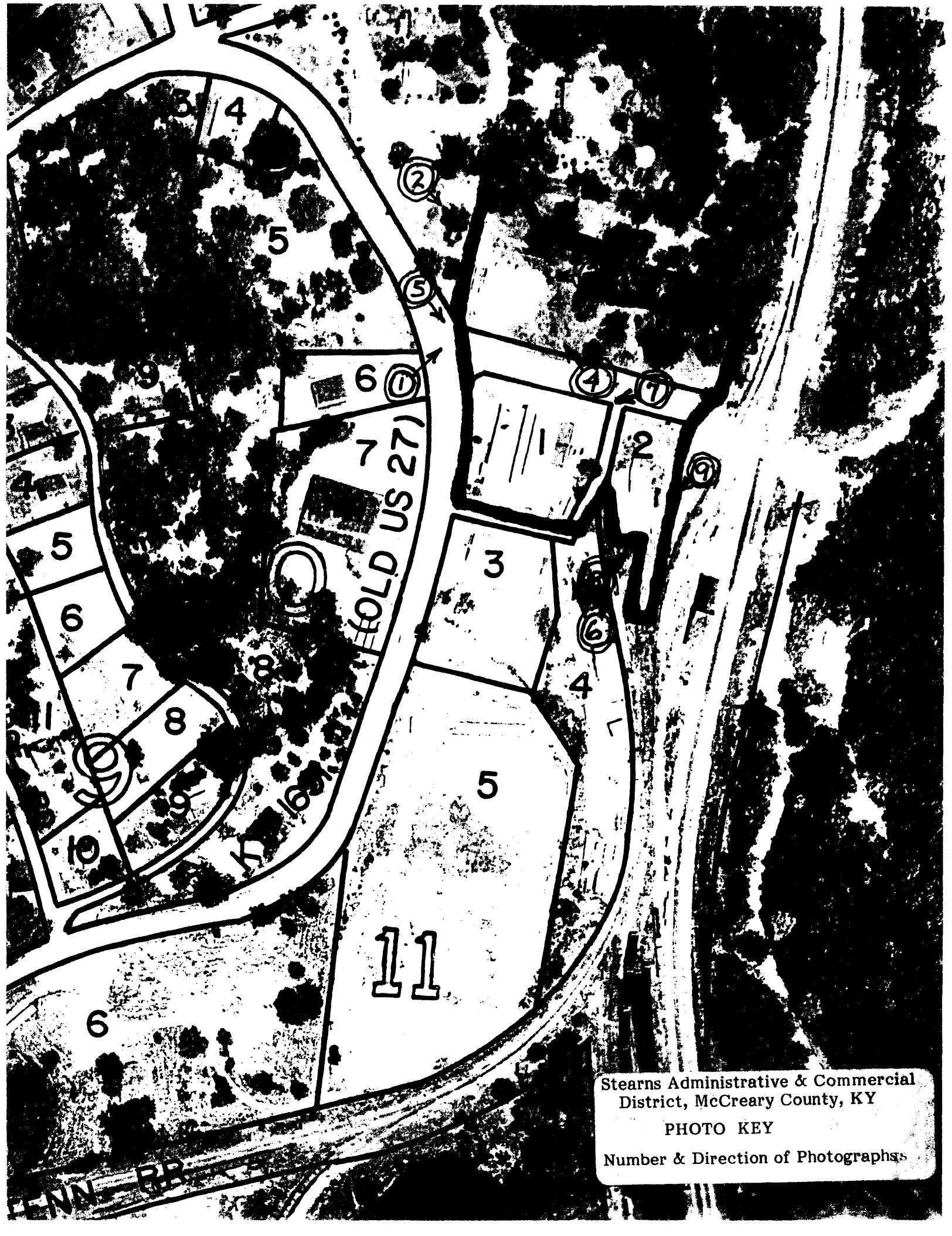




Stearns Administrative and  
Commercial District

PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION MAP  
(Not to Scale)





Stearns Administrative & Commercial  
District, McCreary County, KY

PHOTO KEY

Number & Direction of Photographs

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National Park Service**

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For all Photos:

Group Nomination: Stearns Administrative and Commercial Historic District  
Photographer: Robert M. Polsgrove  
Negative Location: Kentucky Heritage Council, Frankfort, Kentucky  
Date Taken: June 9, 1988

<u>Photo No.</u>	<u>View or Elevation</u>
1	Stearns Administration Building from southwest
2	Stearns Administration Building from northwest
3	Stearns Administration Building from northeast
4	Stearns Administration Building from southeast
5	Stearns Commercial Block from northwest
6	Stearns Commercial Block, rear from southeast
7	Stearns Commercial Block from the northwest
8	Stearns Freight Depot from southwest
9	Stearns Freight Depot from east
10	Stearns Freight Depot, interior