



Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION

PA State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO)

Environmental Review Resource Documentation Guidance for Residential Historic Districts

April 2025

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Introduction

ER Resource Documentation Guidance for Residential Historic Districts in Pennsylvania contains guidance and tools to assist in the research and documentation of residential districts in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office in Pennsylvania (PA SHPO) uses these guidelines to evaluate the integrity of these historic resources.

Residential historic districts are defined by their historic residential use. While there often will be non-residential resources within a residential historic district (churches, schools, parks etc.), the dominant resource type will be residences. If commercial buildings are the dominant resource type and the primary historic use of the area was commercial, please refer to the *ER Resource Documentation Guidance for Commercial Historic Districts in Pennsylvania* for guidance.

Note: Resources that retain integrity may require additional research to assess National Register of Historic Places (National Register) eligibility. Additional research may include the preparation of a physical description, historical narrative, and National Register eligibility assessment. Additional documentation is usually prepared by a historic preservation consultant.

The Table of Contents is linked to the many sections in the *Guidance* for easier navigation; simply put your mouse over the section in the Table of Contents chart, hold down the control button, and click with the mouse. Items of special note, like for particular types of sites, are called out in highlighted text boxes as a reminder. For online viewers, links throughout the report will direct you to the appropriate website.

Information and Attachments Required for Submittal

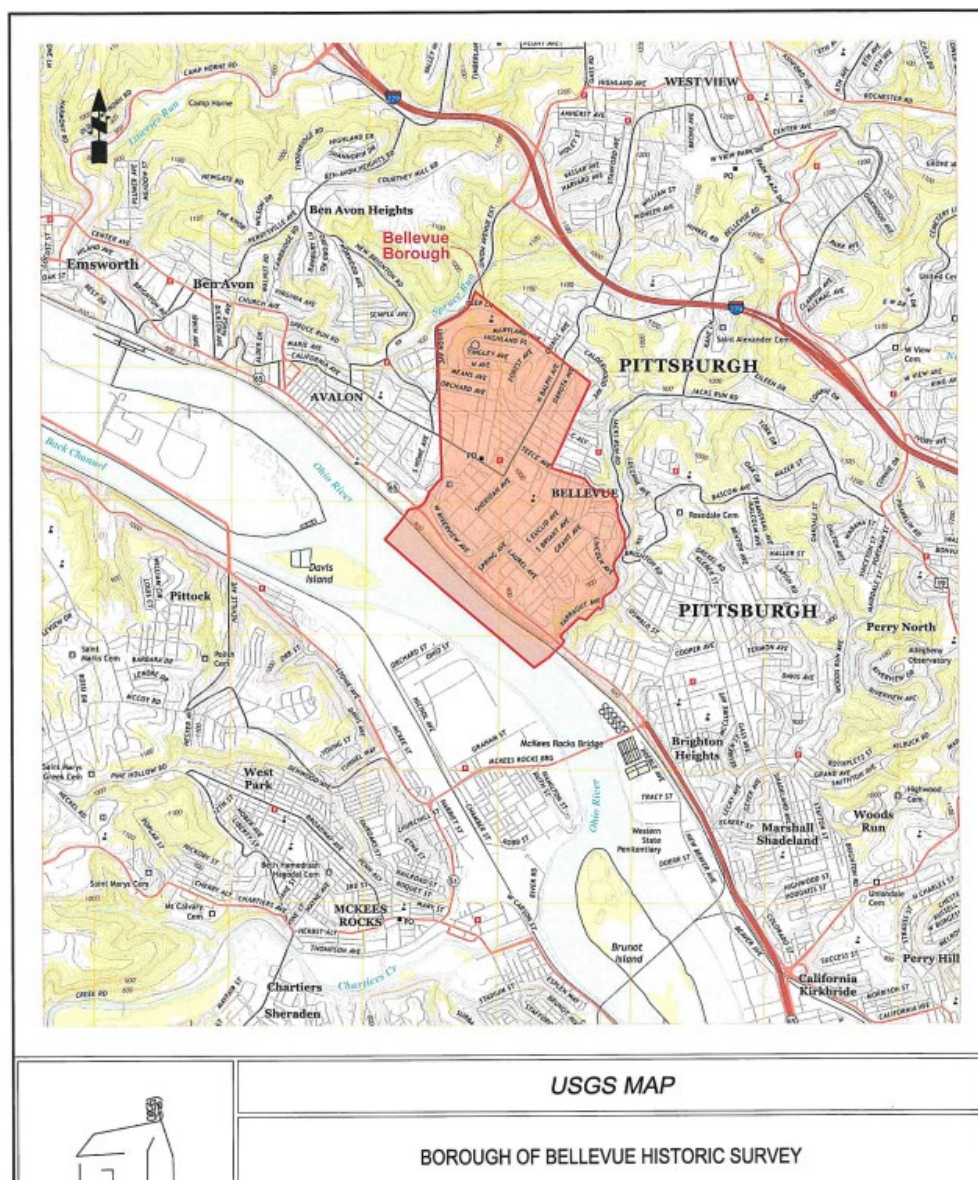
As part of ongoing efforts to facilitate initial documentation of residential historic districts, the PA SHPO requires the following information and related attachments be uploaded to [PA-SHARE](#). These attachments can be combined into a single pdf for ease of viewing.

Documentation should include:

- Map showing the boundary of the historic district. The boundary of the district is generally indicated by changes in use. The base map should be current aerial or street mapping and should show street names.
- Map with numbered photo points indicating the location photographs were taken from and the direction the camera was pointing. This is called a “photo key.”
- Historic and current aerial mapping comparisons to demonstrate how the district has or has not changed over time. The aerials should be zoomed in or out to show for the best clarity, with any changes to the built environment and overall layout of the district labeled and dated. Captions should include the date of the aerials.
 - Historic and current aerials for Pennsylvania are found online at [PennPilot](#).
- Current, color photographs of streetscapes as well as significant individual resources within the district such as schools, stores, or community centers. Include any features unique to the setting (sidewalks, parks, playgrounds, monuments, public areas, etc.). The photos should be numbered and have descriptive captions with numbers included on the photo key.
- Available historic maps.
 - Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps can be found online [here](#).
 - Panoramic Maps can be found online at the [Library of Congress](#).
 - Historic USGS maps can be found [here](#).
- Available historic images to illustrate how the district has or has not changed. Especially useful are aerial views, streetscapes, or images of significant individual resources.
- A physical description of the historic district noting its location, setting, boundaries, and street layout. Discuss the types of resources present and make note of any significant individual properties. Also discuss changes to the district, such as demolition, modern construction, and alterations to historic properties.
- A narrative that summarizes the history of the district from its initial development to the present. This narrative should discuss why the residential district was created (housing for workers in area industry, defense housing, public housing, streetcar suburb, Post World War II housing, etc.) and changes that have or have not been made since the initial development.
- Character defining features checklist for residential districts.

Example Documentation and Attachments

Map Showing the Historic District Boundary



Resource # 2021RE01934: Bellevue Borough Historic District, boundary indicated in red.

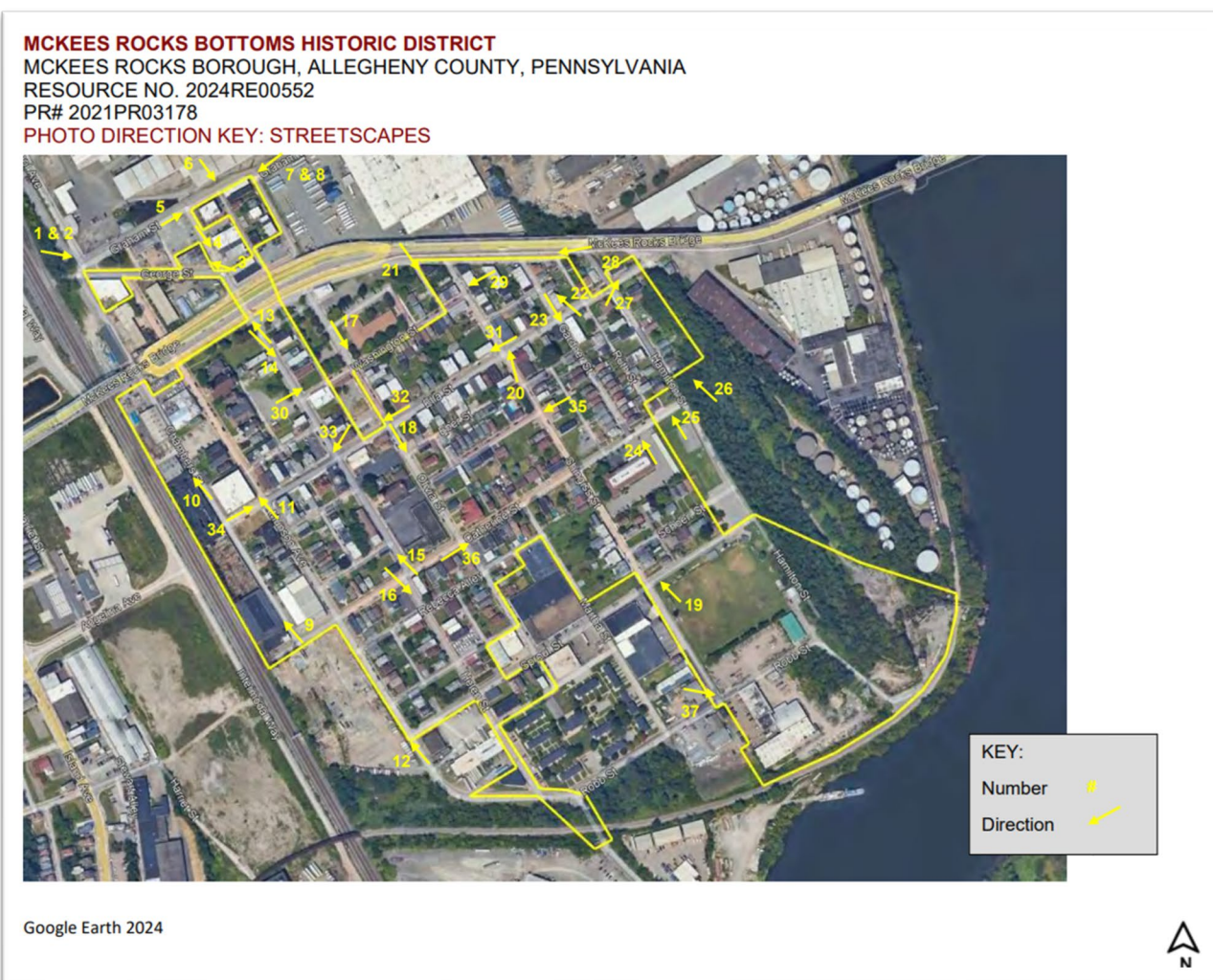
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Resource # 2024RE04952: West Huntingdon Historic District, boundary indicated in red.

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Map with Photo Key

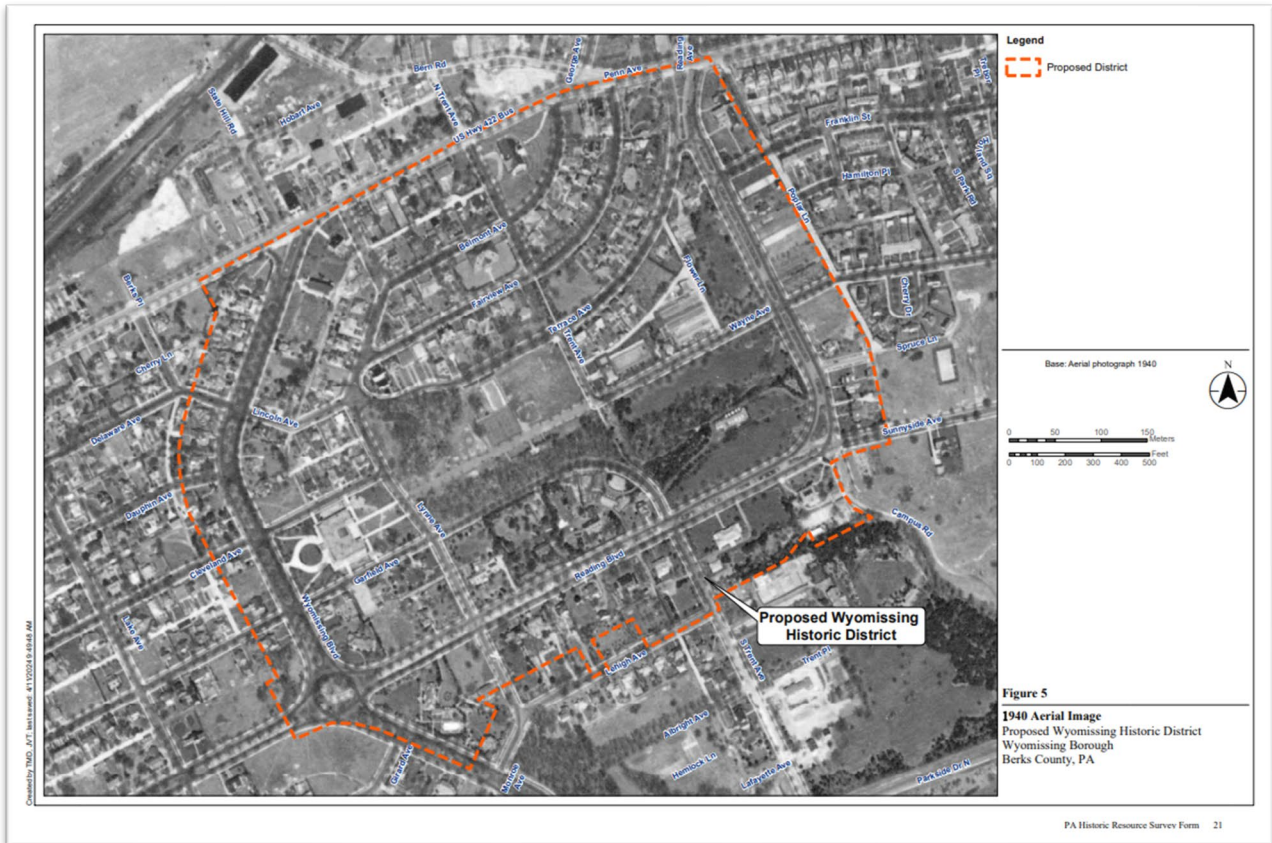


Resource # 2024RE00552: McKees Rocks Bottoms Historic District. The photo points are indicated by numbers with arrows pointing the direction the camera was facing.



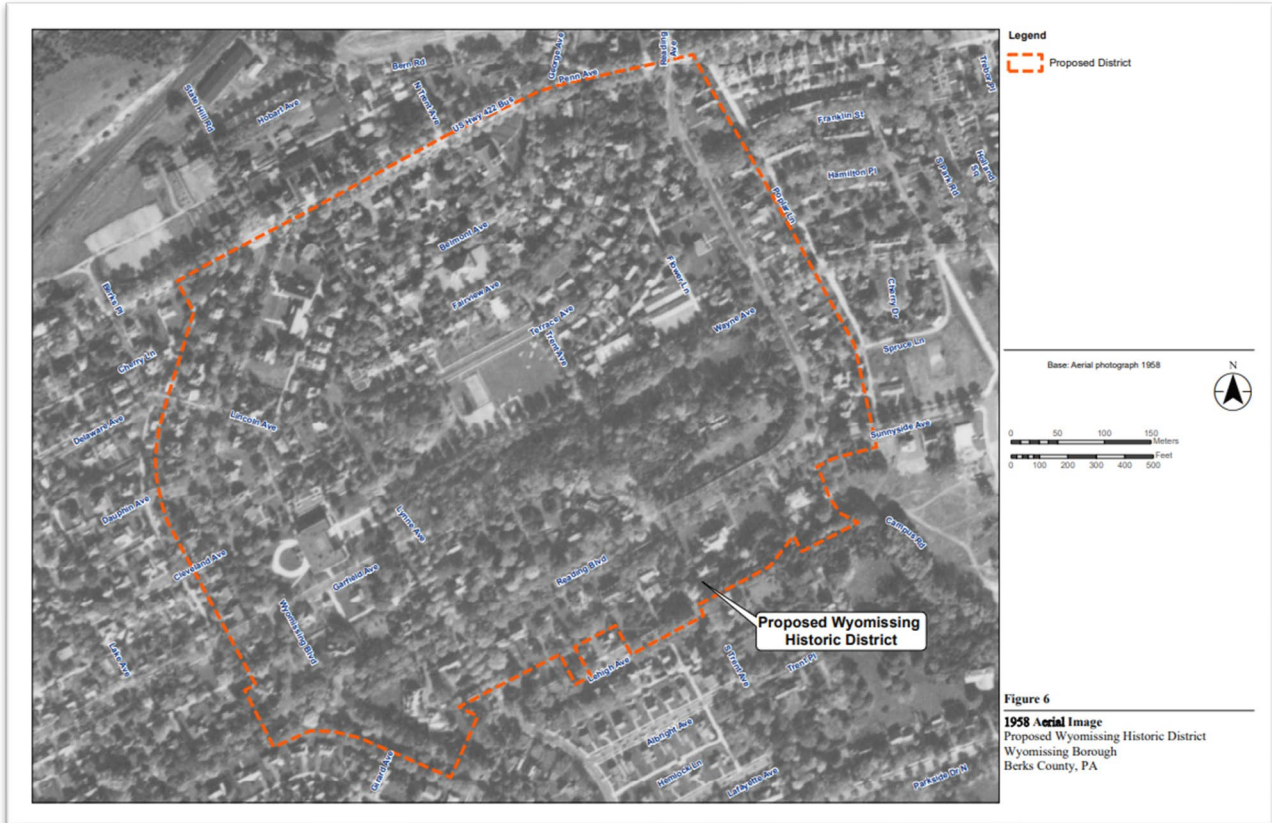
Resource # 2024RE04143: Maryknoll Plan Historic District. Keyed photo points are numbered with camera direction indicated by arrows.

Historic Aerial Comparisons



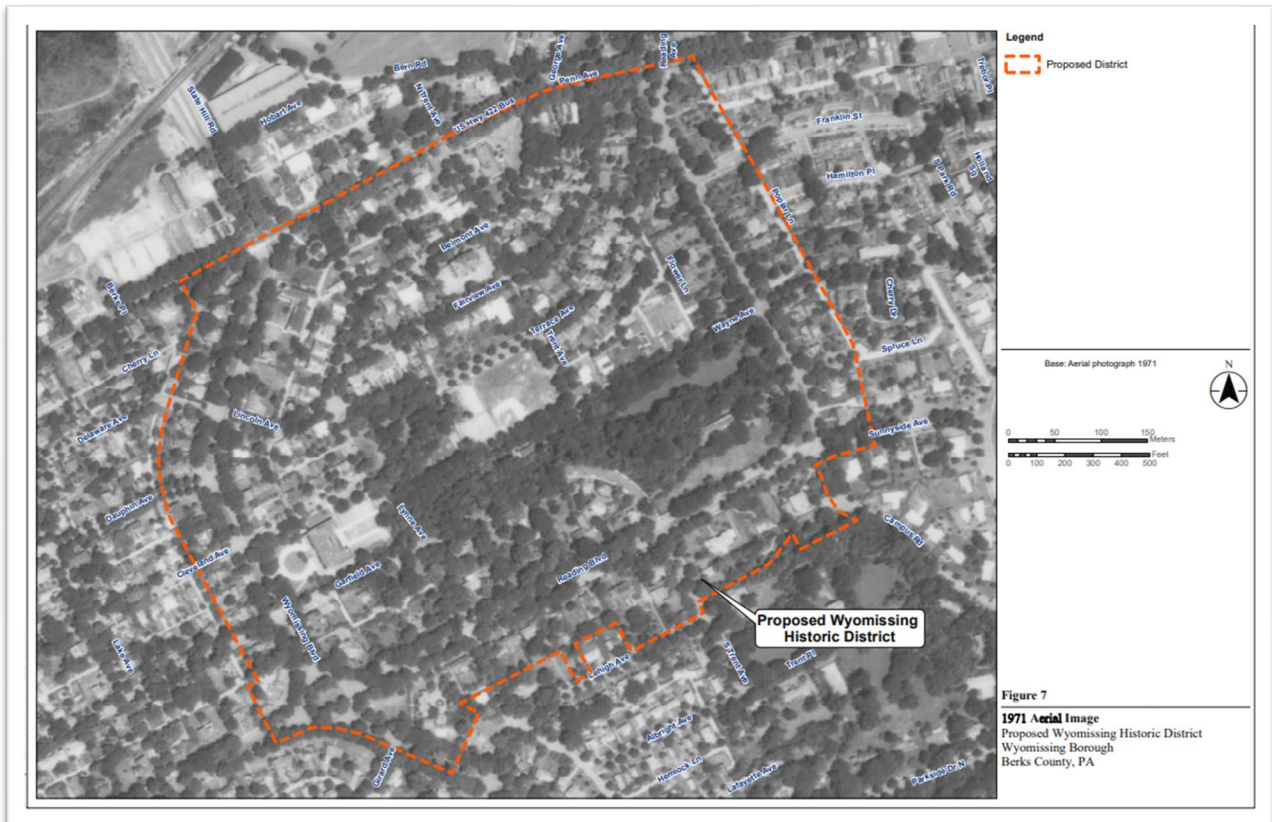
Resource # 2024RE00685: Wyomissing Borough Historic District. The preparer included three historic aerial images with the district boundary indicated to demonstrate the historic development within the district and allow direct comparison between historic and current conditions. The above map is the first in the series and shows aerial imagery from 1940.

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Resource # 2024RE00685: Wyomissing Borough Historic District. The preparer included three historic aerial images with the district boundary indicated to demonstrate the historic development within the district and allow direct comparison between historic and current conditions. The above map is the second in the series shows aerial imagery from 1958.

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Resource # 2024RE00685: Wyomissing Borough Historic District. The preparer included three historic aerial images with the district boundary shown to demonstrate the historic development within the district and allow direct comparison between historic and current conditions. The above map is the third in the series shows aerial imagery from 1971.

Color Photographs of Streetscapes and Notable Buildings



**Photograph 1. Maryknoll Plan, Green Tree Borough, Allegheny County
Overview of East Manilla Avenue, facing southwest**



**Photograph 2. Maryknoll Plan, Green Tree Borough, Allegheny County
Overview and representative Colonial Revival houses on East Manilla Avenue, facing southwest**

Resource # 2024RE04143: Maryknoll Plan Historic District. These streetscape photos help reviewers understand the integrity, design, and character defining elements of the district.

MCKEES ROCKS BOTTOMS HISTORIC DISTRICT

MCKEES ROCKS BOROUGH, ALLEGHENY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

RESOURCE NO. 2024RE00552

PR# 2021PR03178

PHOTOGRAPHS

5.0 Social Halls



Photo 45: 342 Olivia Street, Looking East



Photo 46: 102 Ella Street, Looking Southeast

Resource # 2024RE00552: McKees Rocks Bottoms Historic District. Photographic documentation includes photos of important community resources, including churches and social halls like the two pictured above.



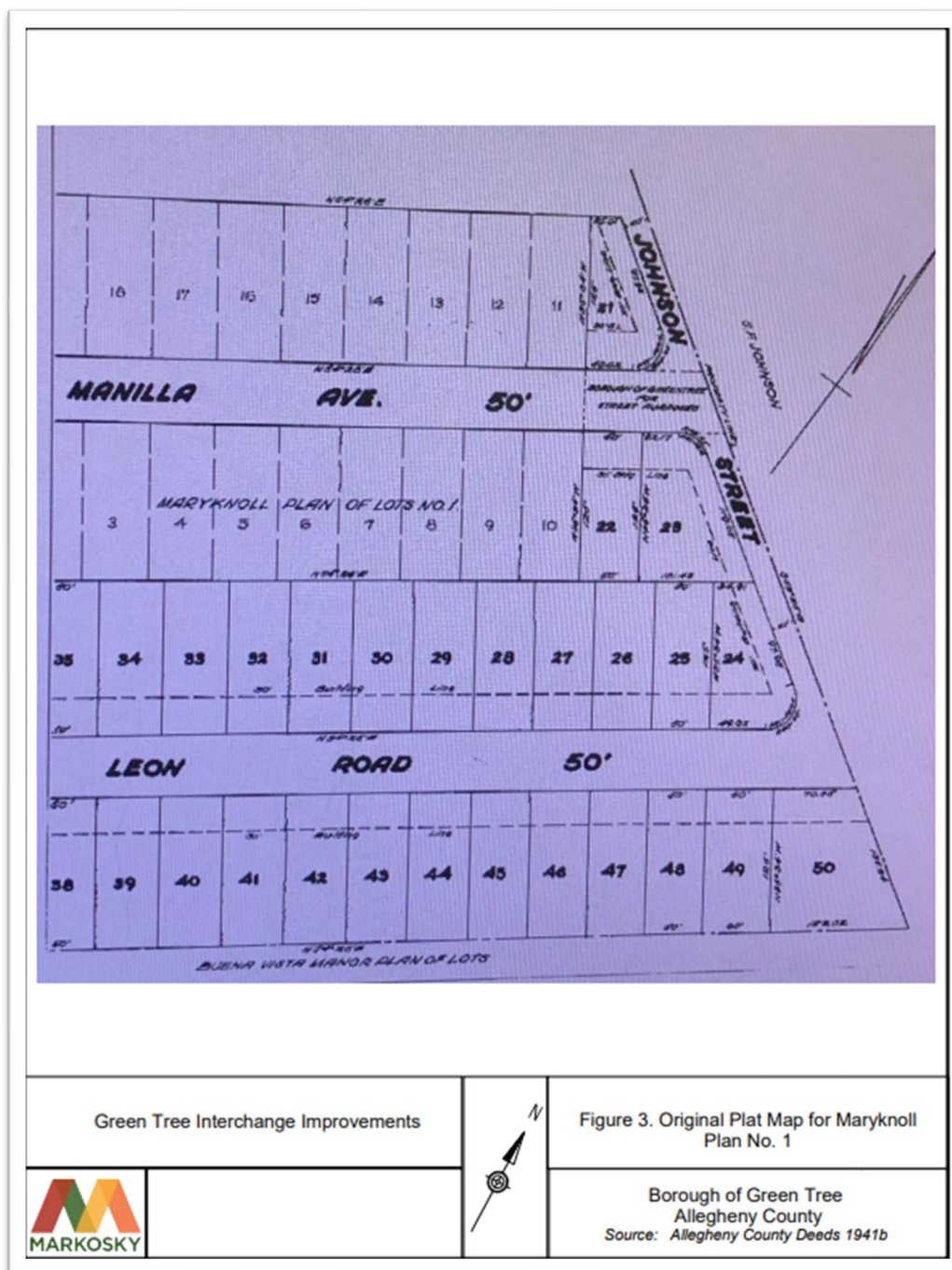
Photograph 9: West elevation of 9 Reading Boulevard (Wyomissing Public Library), ca. 1931, facing southeast (Google Maps Street View: 2019).



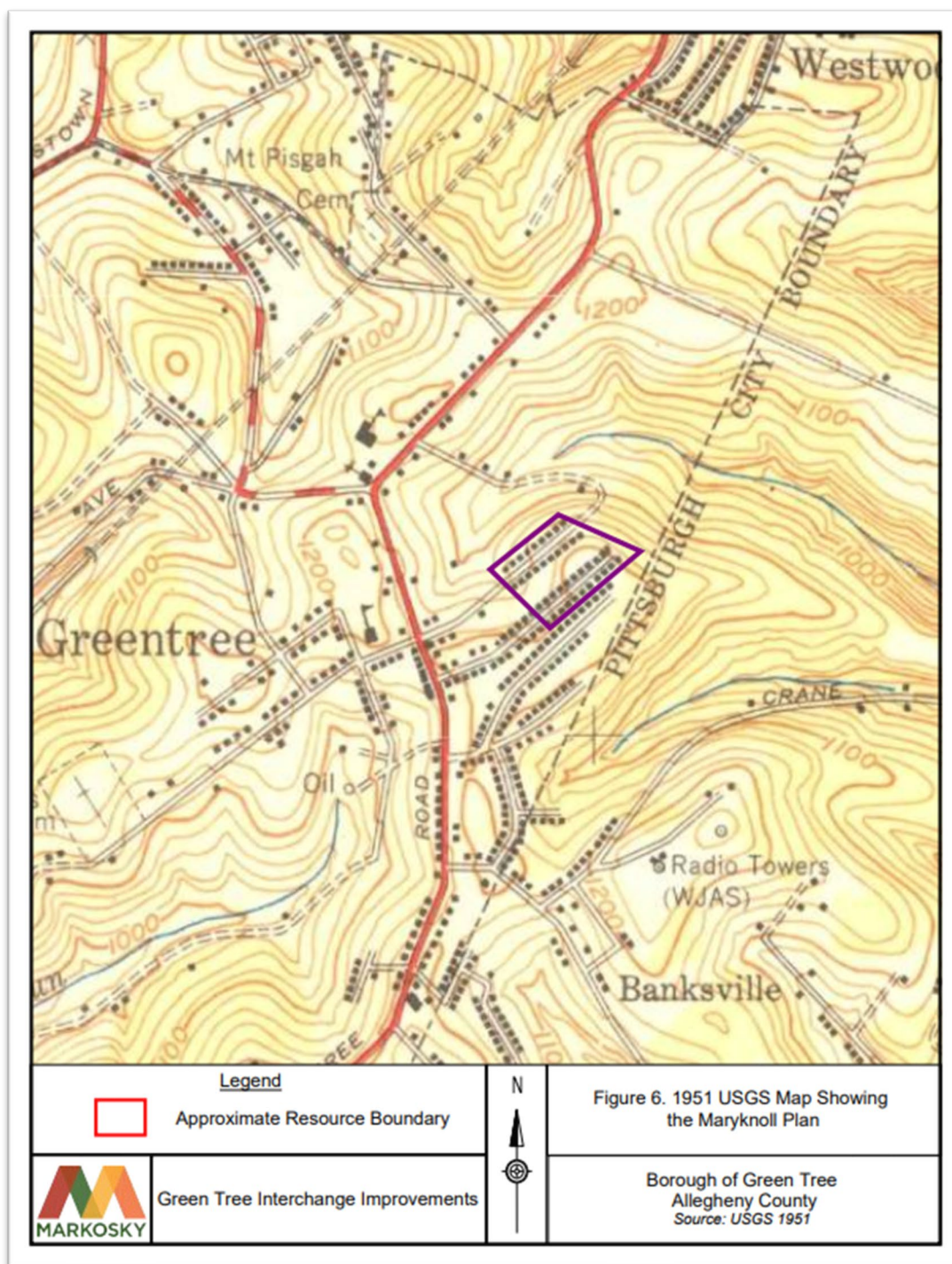
Photograph 10: North elevation of 22 Reading Boulevard (Wyomissing Borough Hall), ca. 1920, facing southeast.

Resource # 2024RE00685: Wyomissing Borough Historic District. Photographic documentation includes individual photographs of significant residences, churches, and public buildings like the local library and borough hall pictured above.

Historic Mapping and Photographs



Resource # 2024RE04143: Maryknoll Plan Historic District. Original plat maps for residential developments are extremely useful. These demonstrate the original arrangement of lots and roadways and also can help determine district boundaries.



Resource # 2024RE04143: Maryknoll Plan Historic District. This historic topographic map shows the extent of residential development in the area in 1951. Historic USGS Topo Maps can be especially useful to document development in more rural communities.



Figure 27. Aerial map of Ambler from 1894.

Resource # 2023RE07090: Ambler Borough Historic District. This type of map is called a bird's-eye view or panoramic map, and they were made for many communities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

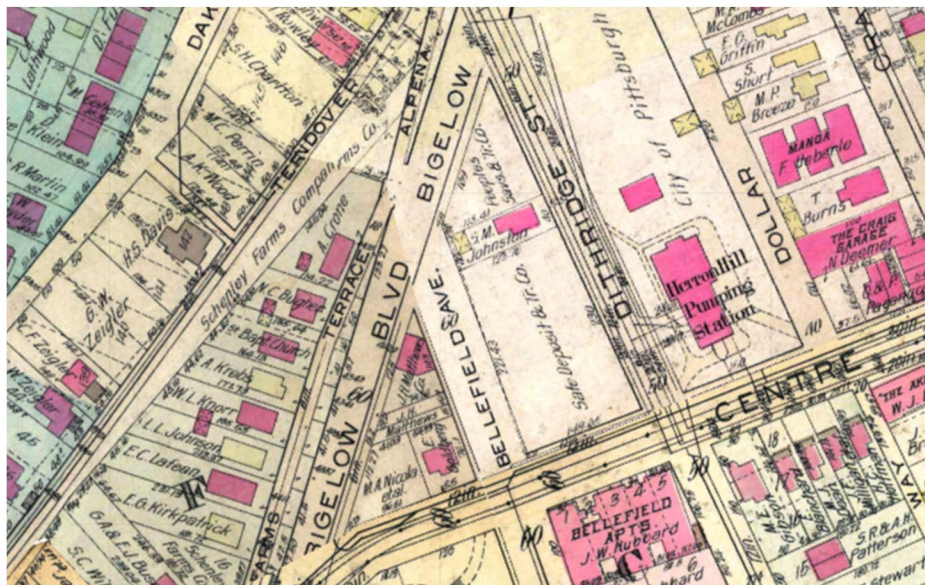


Figure #7 – 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

Resource # 2023RE08310: Schenley Farms Historic District. This 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows an important intersection in the historic district. Insurance Maps provide detailed snapshots of communities and were produced from the late 19th through mid-20th centuries.



Figure 6. Terrace Blvd. facing east, circa 1928 (Mifflin County Historical Society).



Photo 15. Terrace Blvd, photo taken from First Street, facing east.

Resource # 2011RE00588: Juniata Terrace Historic District. Historic photographs can help illustrate the retention or loss of integrity, especially when compared with current photographs retaken from the same vantage point.

	
<p>Figure 5. Advertisement Showing Streetscape in the Maryknoll Plan</p>	
 <p>Green Tree Interchange Improvements</p>	<p>Borough of Green Tree Allegheny County Source: Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph 1942b</p>

Resource # 2024RE04143: Maryknoll Plan Historic District. Historic real estate advertisements like this one sometimes include historic images or illustrations of typical residences or streetscapes.

Physical Description

Physical Description

The Maryknoll Plan is located in the Borough of Green Tree in Allegheny County approximately three miles southwest of the city of Pittsburgh (USGS Map; Site Map) (USGS 2016; Google Earth 2018). The district is located to the southeast of the intersection of Interstate 376 (I-376/Parkway West) and SR 0121 (Greentree Road). The surrounding area is characterized by commercial development fronting the corridor of Greentree Road with additional post-war housing developments located to the east and west. The 9-acre residential plan features large setbacks with fifty houses set within a gentle slope dotted with trees in the center. The two roads within the district, East Manilla Avenue and Leon Road, abut tree buffering along the south side of I-376.

The style and type of dwellings found within the Maryknoll Plan include Minimal Traditional and latterday Colonial Revival (**Photographs 1-4**). The frame dwellings are one-and-a-half or two stories with applied exterior materials such as stretcher bond brick and replacement vinyl (most often covering dormer windows, on projecting gables, on second story overhangs of Colonial Revival homes, and on rear additions). Roof material generally consists of replacement asphalt shingle. Foundation material typically consists of concrete block and most homes are set atop one-bay, integral garages. Fenestration generally consists of double-hung, replacement vinyl windows with simple brick sills. All of the dwellings in the district feature exterior brick chimneys and many have partial width, shed roof porches attached to the façade, which were not featured in the original plans of the homes. Some dwellings also exhibit large side or rear additions.

The two streets of the plan are laid out in a rectilinear grid with narrow lots that seem more like the design of a trolley suburb than the curvilinear roads of a typical automobile suburb. The roads have rolled curbs but no sidewalks.

Integrity

The Maryknoll Plan retains integrity. The district retains integrity of location as it has not been moved. Integrity of design has been maintained as most buildings within the district retain their form, plan, massing, structure, and style. The district retains integrity of setting as it is still located in a suburban setting in proximity to major transportation routes, which was an early selling point of the development. There has been some loss of integrity of materials and workmanship due to minimal alterations to exterior materials and some additions but not enough to hinder the original intention of the house designs within the district. The district retains integrity of feeling and association as the district generally continues to convey its historic appearance and the area is still a small suburban housing plan.

Resource # 2024RE04143: Maryknoll Plan Historic District. While short, the description above includes important information about the historic district. It discusses the district's location and setting, its layout, and the main types of historic resources it contains, including discussing their age and the main types of building forms and architectural styles represented.

Historical Narrative

Property History

The area comprising present-day Wyomissing Borough was originally developed by the Reading Suburban Real Estate Company beginning in 1896. The area was largely agricultural prior to the late nineteenth century, although a turnpike (Penn Avenue) and the Lebanon Valley Railroad had been established (Figure 3). With the purchase of several farms in the area, the company owned over 600 acres, which they divided up into several lots and boulevards and planted “25,000 shade trees” (Montgomery, 1909). This initiated the development of creating the Wyomissing community into a park-like environment. Once Wyomissing was incorporated in 1906, the boundary was established, “about one mile square, extending from the Lebanon Valley railroad on the north to the Wyomissing Road on the south, and from Smith Street on the east...to a public road on the west commonly known as ‘Mengels’ Mill Road” (Montgomery, 1909).

In 1896, Thomas P. Merritt, a businessman and lumber dealer from Reading, purchased the Yost, Van Steffy and Jaeger farms in Spring Township, Berks County. The Reading Suburban Real Estate Company was formed in 1896 with the intention of developing land in present-day Wyomissing. The company was formed by Thomas P. Merritt, Albert Thalheimer, David H. Keiser, Matthias Mengel, and Levi W. Mengel. The company anticipated rapid growth in the area as a result of the decision of the firm of Thun & Janssen to establish manufacturing facilities in present-day Wyomissing. After acquiring the land, the real estate company began advertising for several lots. The first residence in the community was built in 1896 by W.A. Walters (Reading Eagle, 2021). The promoters of the community advertised Wyomissing as a suburban enclave of Reading, with electric railway connections to the city. The Reading Suburban Real Estate Company noted the 100-foot-wide Wyomissing Boulevard and 90-foot-wide Reading Boulevard in their promotional materials, emphasizing modern inducements to attract buyers. During the first year, sixteen homes were built within Wyomissing (The Times Leader, 1897).

A major factor in the growth of Wyomissing was the decision of the industrialists, Ferdinand Thun and Henry Janssen, to relocate their Textile Machine Works facilities to Spring Township. The company had been established in 1892 in the City of Reading. Ferdinand Thun and Henry Janssen, in 1896, chose a location alongside the railroad to establish their manufacturing building and office space fit to employ over 100 individuals (Montgomery, 1909). The residential community at Wyomissing began to flourish with the development of the textile industry. Shortly after the construction of the Textile Machine Works factory, dwellings were constructed to accommodate the workers along Penn Avenue. Upper-class dwellings were constructed along Reading and Wyomissing Boulevards. The company expanded in 1900 and 1906 when Thun and Janssen incorporated Narrow Fabric Company and Textile Machine Works, thereby expanding the company’s productions and output. Thun and Janssen’s companies continued to grow and thrive, eventually resulting in the formation of Wyomissing Industries. Wyomissing Industries was composed of Textile Machine Works, Narrow Fabric Company, and Berkshire Knitting Mills.

In 1903, several prominent businessmen from the community, including T.P. Merritt, A. Thalheimer, D.H. Keiser, Ferdinand Thun, and Henry Janssen, met at the Wyomissing Hotel to promote the establishment of a separate government. Wyomissing Borough was incorporated on July 2, 1906. Thun served as the first President of Council (Smith, 2020). Between 1908 and 1909, the first Wyomissing Borough Hall was constructed at the intersection of Penn Avenue and Wyomissing Boulevard. Ferdinand Thun served as borough council president for 37 years. During his time as president, Thun managed Wyomissing Industries and helped to plan the development of Wyomissing. Thun developed “the first zoning plans, a mixed-use housing program, public schools, playground and swimming pool, parks, trees, and other well-run public services...” (The Wyomissing Foundation, 2012). Through the assistance of Thun and other partners, the Wyomissing Building and Savings Association was created in 1902, which further assisted with the building of the residential area around Wyomissing. Thun also assisted in creating the Wyomissing Development

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Company and the Delta Realty Company to build over a hundred homes within the Wyomissing and West Reading area. By the 1920s the area had been significantly developed (Figure 4). Thun retired from borough council president ca. 1943 and died in 1949.

Sitting two miles west of Reading, Pennsylvania, the borough originally encompassed 510 acres and 92 perches of land. The town served as a residential and industrial community with the prominent industrial presence of Wyomissing Industries established by Ferdinand Thun and Henry Janssen. Between 1910 and 1920 approximately 2,000 people moved into the Wyomissing Borough. During the 1920s through the 1940s Wyomissing Industries was the largest manufacturer of hosiery in the world. Wyomissing Industries (composed of Textile Machine Works, Berkshire Knitting Mills, and Narrow Fabric Company) employed thousands of workers at its Wyomissing facilities. Between 1940 and 1950, the neighborhoods surrounding Wyomissing Borough began to grow in size and population (Figures 5 and 6). These neighborhoods did not incorporate planning similar to Wyomissing Borough. They adopted the same rectangular city block structure as Reading during this time. In 1950, Wyomissing Borough annexed parts of Spring Township. The parts from Spring Township later turned into a business center for Wyomissing. In 1969, Wyomissing Industries was sold to Vanity Fair Corporation. During the late twentieth century, the borough benefitted from its proximity to major transportation systems, including US 222, which established a connection to Penn Avenue in the borough during the 1960s. State Hill Road was extended north to provide access to the interchange with US 422/222 (Figure 7). Wyomissing Borough's population continued to grow in the later years but this was due to the annexations of other areas surrounding Wyomissing into the borough, like Wyomissing Hills. The community has transitioned during the twenty-first century as a commercial office and retail center, with companies like UGI's Energy Services Headquarters, Tower Health's Corporate Offices and Training Center, Teleflex/ Arrow's R&D and Innovation Center, and Drexel University College of Medicine.

Resource # 2024RE00685: Wyomissing Borough Historic District. Historical narratives should cover the history from the early development of a district through modern times.

Additional Resources

Example Properties

Examples of previously documented residential historic districts can be found in [PA-SHARE](#).

- Resource # 2021RE01934: Bellevue Borough Historic District.
- Resource # 2024RE04952: West Huntingdon Historic District.
- Resource # 2024RE00552: McKees Rocks Bottoms Historic District.
- Resource # 2024RE04143: Maryknoll Plan Historic District.
- Resource # 2024RE00685: Wyomissing Borough Historic District.
- Resource # 2023RE07090: Ambler Borough Historic District.
- Resource # 2023RE08310: Schenley Farms Historic District.
- Resource # 2011RE00588: Juniata Terrace Historic District.

Historic Contexts

This document can be helpful to reference when preparing documentation for post World War II suburbs:

- *Research Guide for Developing a Context for Evaluating Post World War II Suburbs* (Report # 2010RP00255)

A full list of all contexts can be found on the [PA SHPO website](#) with instructions on how to find each context in [PA-SHARE](#).

Historic Research Resources

- Oral interviews with subdivision occupants
- Plat maps for subdivisions can sometimes be found in County Courthouse records and can be useful for determining the boundary of the residential district.
- Local historical societies and libraries often have collections of photos or postcards.
- [Newspapers.com](#) and [Pennsylvania Newspaper Archive](#) can be used to find historic advertisements and articles.

Character Defining Features Checklist for Residential Historic Districts

Check all features that remain that are 50 years in age or older. Character defining features will vary depending on the age and type of residential development, and not all features are required for a residential historic district to retain integrity.

Include this completed checklist in your PA-SHARE submission.

Majority of historic resources are residences (single-family homes and/or multi-unit)

Presence of neighborhood parks, schools, churches, cemeteries, community centers, and/or other community buildings

Buildings typically no more than 1-3 stories high (with the exception of larger apartment buildings)

Uniform street setbacks

Sidewalks

Trees or other plantings along streets

Presence of front/backyards, garages/carports, sheds, and other ancillary domestic structures