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A CASE STUDY OF OVERALL HISTORIC CHARACTER AND PRESERVATION INITIATIVES: OLEY TOWNSHIP HISTORIC DISTRICT, BERKS COUNTY, PA

A Thesis in
Landscape Architecture
by
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ABSTRACT

As one of the first historic districts to cover an entire township, Oley Township Historic District in Berks County, Pennsylvania was nominated for inclusion in the National Register in 1982. Through the years since its nomination, local residents and organizations have established a variety of measures to ensure the preservation of Oley’s historic character. While other historic areas in Pennsylvania suffer from uncontrolled suburban sprawl and industrial development, Oley has engaged zoning regulations, farmland preservation programs, and its local residents. In effect, the township exhibits an intact and discernible historic landscape.

The goal of this research is to broadly examine Oley’s historic resources in terms of their existence at the present date and connect this continued existence to specific preservation initiatives at the township and county level. This research identifies what factors have contributed to Oley’s intact historic state and suggests how other areas can borrow or learn from this case study. Specific areas covered include local zoning ordinances, farmland preservation initiatives, comprehensive planning, and community involvement.

The study of rural historic districts holds special significance to historic preservation because there is a need for a deeper understanding of landscape and cultural dynamics, management techniques, and most of all, the extent to which current preservation strategies have proven effective (Melnick 2008). Oley township residents, as well as several outside agencies and concerned individuals, have implemented many different conservation and preservation strategies within the township, but how have these impacted the historic landscape in Oley? While it’s apparent Oley has retained its historic character, how did this happen when neighboring townships seem to have favored development over protecting historic character?
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Introduction

As one of the first historic districts to cover an entire township, Oley Township Historic District was nominated for National Register inclusion in 1982. Since its nomination, local residents and organizations have established a variety of measures to ensure the preservation of Oley’s historic character. This case study reviews what makes Oley historically unique and to what degree specific initiatives and factors have enabled Oley Township to retain its discernible historic character.

In 1978, Oley Township residents observed local streams and springs drying up. It didn’t take long for locals to connect the dots back to a local limestone quarry which had just opened a new quarry site which subsequently redirected local water sources. Ironically, the same fertile soil which had attracted and supported Oley’s earliest settlers for generations became an exploitable resource for the aggregate and concrete industry. Concerned residents decided it was time to take action before other natural and historic resources were destroyed.

It was not long after some of the township’s springs and streams started to dry up that township residents began pursuing ways to preserve natural and historic resources. In 1979, with persuasion from the Berks County Conservancy, Oley residents applied for one of the National Trust’s Rural Project demonstration communities (Stokes et al. 1997). In March 1980, Oley Township was selected as one of two finalists out of 60 applicants (PA Township News 1981). The Rural Project provided technical assistance, training and publications to better preserve rural areas (National Trust 2005). As a result, the
Berks County Conservancy and Oley residents conducted a study of Oley Township’s natural and historic resources within four different focus groups as follows: a historic resource group, an agricultural group, a visual qualities group, and a natural resources group. Ultimately, the historic resource group pursued National Register status for the township in 1982 (PA Township News 1981).

Oley Township Rural Historic District, located in Berks County, Pennsylvania received National Register status in 1984. Considered significant for its intact early Pennsylvania Germanic landscape, Oley Township is home to dozens of historic farmsteads, local industries and small hamlets. As an offshoot of the Rural Project, Oley’s National Register nomination entails a large volume of work which included the identification and inventorying of over 300 historic properties throughout the township. The Rural Project’s subcommittee for historic resources decided they needed a part-time coordinator. They began a national level search for candidates but decided to hire a local resident, Phoebe Hopkins, who was charged with compiling and overseeing the National Register nomination process in Oley Township between 1982 and 1984 (Stokes et al. 1997).

While the Rural Project initiated Oley residents’ call to preservation action, it was just the first in a long list of preservation related projects and initiatives locals became involved in. After the National Register status was established in 1984, zoning laws were created and finalized in 1992 (and are updated regularly). A detailed zoning plan was created limiting developable areas to a narrow corridor through the north central part of the township. In addition, agricultural security areas and easements programs were implemented that currently protect the majority of the township’s agricultural lands.
Research Intent

This research examines Oley Township’s historic resources as they relate to its National Register nomination and what programs and factors have allowed Oley to retain its historic integrity. This research hopes to shed light on the following questions: 1) where and when did landscape change happen; 2) what factors caused landscape change; 3) what is the effect of specific landscape changes to the overall historic landscape character; and 4) in what ways did specific programs help protect Oley’s historic and natural resources? In its completion, this study will illustrate how particular initiatives and community action within Oley Township have successfully protected its historic resources – and how these lessons can be used to better protect other rural historic districts.

Significance of Research

The study of rural historic districts holds special significance to historic preservation because there is a need for a deeper understanding of landscape and cultural dynamics, management techniques, and most of all, the extent to which current preservation strategies have proven effective (Melnick 2008). Oley township residents, as well as several outside agencies and concerned individuals, have implemented many different conservation and preservation strategies within the township, but how have these impacted the historic landscape in Oley? While it seems apparent Oley has retained its historic character, why did this happen as neighboring townships seem to have favored development over protecting historic character?

One of the most striking features of Oley is its productive farmland. Local residents appear to understand the value of protecting it. From 1982 to 2007, over 23 million acres of farmland in the United States was lost to development; an area equivalent to the land
area of Indiana (American Farmland Trust 2010). Of the 23 million acres, nearly 9 million acres were considered prime agricultural land; farmland consisting of soils best suited for food production (Dempsey and Ferguson 2010; American Farmland Trust 2010). Pennsylvania alone lost 728,700 acres (8.54% overall loss) from 1982 to 2007 (American Farmland Trust 2007). Rural historic districts commonly contain valuable farmland (although there are some exceptions) and studying a place such as Oley Township can help shed light on which conservation and preservation efforts have worked and the types of rural areas that might be served by similar approaches to preservation.

**Key Definitions**

Several terms are used throughout the research pertaining to National Register nominations and historic landscapes. The following is a list of terms encountered throughout the document.

*Cultural Landscape*- the Cultural Landscape Foundation defines a cultural landscape as a place that is associated with a significant event, activity, person or group of people and exhibit works of art, cultural narratives, and expresses a distinct regional identity.

*Historic American Building Survey (HABS)* - a survey of historic architectural resources beginning in 1933 during the Roosevelt Administration. Typical resources include buildings, structures and objects.

*Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS)* - developed to compliment the HABS surveys to include landscape and site related resources.

*Historic Narrative*- a significant portion of the National Register Nomination process in which a narrative about a site’s past is presented.
National Historic Preservation Act of 1966- developed under the Lyndon Johnson Administration in order to protect the Nation’s historic resources from federally funded projects.

National Register of Historic Places - the National Park Service defines the register as a list of “cultural resources worthy for preservation.” Resources can include buildings, sites, objects, structures and districts. The National Register is administered by the Secretary of the Interior.

Overlay Zoning - overlay zoning ordinances are created to further protect natural and cultural features, such as historic districts, waterfronts, scenic views, agricultural areas, or wetlands. Overlay zoning creates an additional layer of standards and criteria that must be followed in addition to any existing zoning that may cover a particular area. For example, an area may be zoned agricultural but may also be zoned as part of a historic district as is the case in Oley Township.

Rural Historic District - the National Park Service defines a rural historic district as a “geographical area that historically has been used by people, or shaped or modified by human activity, occupancy, or intervention, and that possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of areas of land use, vegetation, buildings, structures, roads and waterways, and natural features.”

Sliding Scale Zoning - a type of agricultural zoning which allows large landholders to create smaller lots for development in proportion to their overall land acreage. For example, one particular ordinance permits 1 additional lot for 7 acres, 2 for 7 to 30 acres, and another lot for each additional 50 acres (Stokes et al. 1997).

State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) - an officer who facilitates the national register process at the state level. SHPOs conduct meetings to determine which historic
properties can be included in the National Register before sending suggestions to the Secretary of the Interior for final approval.

*Statement of Significance* - a statement that makes a case for why a property should be included in the National Register. In order to be eligible for inclusion, a property must meet one of 4 criteria including connections to a significant event, the life of a significant person, possess a distinctive characteristic, or have the potential to yield future information about the past.

*Secretary of the Interior* - according to the Secretary of the Interior’s website, the Secretary is charged to “protect America’s natural resources and heritage, honor our cultures and tribal communities, and supply the energy to power our future.”

**Document Structure**

This research is structured to provide an abbreviated introduction to historic preservation from the perspective of the National Register and historic landscapes; the relevant literature in historic preservation; and a case study of preservation efforts in Oley Township. The document is structured into 5 chapters. Chapter 2 covers early preservation roots, the evolution of preservation programs (including the Rural Project and the National Register), and specific areas of preservation study, including preservation values. Chapter 3 covers research methods. Chapters 4 and 5 cover historic character and preservation initiatives. Appendix A includes the full National Register nomination form for Oley Township and National Register photos.
Chapter 2

Historic Preservation Background and Literature Review

Introduction

Historic preservation benefits from a long tradition of multidisciplinary interaction between historians, geographers, sociologists, architects, and landscape architects. As a result, historic preservation literature covers a broad range of subjects. This section has three purposes: 1) to situate landscape preservation within the larger field of historic preservation, 2) provide context to preservation law leading to the National Register, and 3) and explore current literature related to rural historic landscape preservation. In the first half of this chapter, I provide an overview of preservation history, laws, and programs. The second half covers historic landscape preservation topics including case studies, values, and research gaps.

Early Roots of Historic Preservation

Historic preservation in the United States can be traced to house museums such as George Washington’s Mount Vernon, individual efforts to save the John Hancock House in Boston, and localized preservation activity (Holleran 2004). In 1853, Ann Pamela Cunningham created a women’s preservation group for the preservation of Mount Vernon after the Virginia Legislature refused to buy the property as a national landmark (Grabitske 2004). This event spawned the first national women’s group, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA), which continues to “save, restore, and preserve” the property to this day (Grabitske 2004).
Around the same time the MVLA was busy with Washington’s estate, residents of Boston saw their historic landmarks disappearing. Drawing on inspiration from the successes of the MVLA and other citizen groups, Beacon Hill residents argued for the preservation of the Hancock House which neighbored Massachusetts’ statehouse. Descendants of the Hancock Family decided to sell the land but to donate the building to the city for preservation. The city made plans to move the house but backed away due to the costs associated with moving such a large structure. This spurred a flurry of citizen donations to help fund the project; however, these efforts were ignored and the house was razed. This unfortunate event emboldened preservationists in Boston, who later saved Old South Meetinghouse in 1876 (Holleran 2004).

As a social movement, historic preservation became more visible between the years 1880 and 1940 when four key groups of preservationists appeared (Wallace 1996). The first two groups, the New England “aristocrats” and the Old South’s “antebellum class”, turned to preservation as to dream “nostalgically of the golden days when their ancestors had been undisputed masters of the region” (Wallace 1996, 182). The third group included millionaires of the industrial revolution, including Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, who set out to save places that their industrial empires threatened (Wallace 1996). Finally, the fourth group comprised of the “professional and managerial strata” (Wallace 1996, 183). This group turned to preservation as a reaction to societal conditions during the 1880 to 1920 period. The four groups had one thing in common: they “all developed distaste for unrestrained capitalism” (Wallace 1996, 185). Despite the fact that many of these groups gained notoriety and wealth from capitalist system, they acknowledged that the system also favored progress for the sake of progress and rarely looked back to remember or keep remnants of its humble beginnings in America.

For the most part, preservationists of the 1880 to 1940 period were pleased with their progress (Wallace 1996). They had managed to block the development of historic sites
including battlefields, southern plantations, New England homes, and colonial towns (Wallace 1996). However, it was apparent that more could be done. Soon, preservation activities became rooted in the government realm. Government entities, such as the National Park Service, provided funding through several programs that helped redefine what preservation entailed (Wallace 1996). Instead of preserving the homes of aristocrats, preservationists began preserving places important to local communities and expanding preservation education with WPA state guidebooks, historic markers, and collections of local folklore (Wallace 1996).

Historic Preservation in the National Spotlight

The first national movement advocating historic preservation began with the 1906 Antiquities Act, created in response to the raiding and damage of archeological sites in Arizona and New Mexico (Keune 1985). Following suit, the National Park Service was formed in 1916, which established the framework for protecting America’s natural and cultural resources (National Park Service 2000). Another big step towards cohesive preservation policies came with the Historic Sites Act of 1935. The Historic Sites Act initiated the process of designating national historic landmarks, surveying historic places and acquisition of historic properties (Keune 1985; King 2000).

In addition to early legislation, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) was created in 1933 to record America’s historic structures and sites (Library of Congress 2012; King 2000). The National Park Service hired unemployed architects to “survey and record all ‘historic’ buildings in the US” (Wallace 1996, 184). The collection of photographs, measured drawings, and written histories included well-known places such as the Golden Gate Bridge to lesser-known sites of local importance including old oil well ruins in western Pennsylvania and stone farmsteads in eastern Pennsylvania.
Although part of the permanent, historic record, by 1966 half of the twelve thousand properties documented in the 1930s were demolished to make room for urban renewal and highway projects (Wallace 1996).

In 2000, the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) was incorporated into the HABS program in response to growing awareness of historic landscapes (The Library of Congress 2007). Current HABS and HALS account for over 556,900 measured drawings and photographs, and an additional 38,600 written histories on certain structures and sites, however most material deals with architecture and single objects such as monuments (The Library of Congress 2007).

**The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966**

By the 1960s, historic preservation was gaining support from a broad base of city residents who wanted to end careless urban renewal (Wallace 1996). Entire city blocks and neighborhoods were demolished for new highways and housing developments without prior consultation with the residents. In effect, historic preservation became more of a grassroots movement. In response, the National Register was created through the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. The part of the NHPA most preservationists are familiar with is section 106 that outlines special protections for historic resources. The NHPA section 106 read as follows:

*The head of any Federal agency having direct or indirect jurisdiction over a proposed Federal or federally assisted undertaking in any State and the head of any Federal department or independent agency having authority to license any undertaking shall, prior to the approval of the expenditure of any Federal funds on the undertaking or prior to the issuance of any license, as the case may be, take into account the effect of the undertaking on any district, site, building,*
structure, or object that is included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. The head of any such Federal agency shall afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation established under Title II of this Act a reasonable opportunity to comment with regard to such undertaking. (16 U.S.C. 470f)

In addition to the National Register, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) was initiated to “promote the preservation, enhancement, and sustainable use of our nation’s diverse historic resources, and to advise the President and the Congress on national historic preservation policy” (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation 2011). Part of ACHP’s mission is to help inform the federal government how certain actions will affect historic sites as well as how local, state and federal government entities can become better stewards of historic sites.

The NHPA of 1966 was not the first preservation oriented legislation in the United States, but to date it has been the most encompassing. The act has subsequently been revised in 1979, 1986, 1992, and 1999 (King 2000).

A 1979 revision to NHPA added four new tasks for government agencies to implement with any federally funded project. These four tasks are:

- Required agencies to identify possible historic resources that could be affected by a project with the direction of the state preservation officer (SHPO),
- Determine whether a property was eligible under the National Register using the National Park Service’s guidelines,
- Decide if the project would adversely affect a historic resource identified,
- And if adverse, the agency and SHPO would have to find a way to reduce the adverse effect if possible (King 2000).

Revisions to NHPA in 1992 placed more emphasis on Native American and Native Hawaiian preservation activities and required federal agencies to incorporate preservation
planning into their programs (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation 2011). Revisions in 1999 were intended to streamline Section 106 but ultimately complicated it (King 2000, 21-22). Objections to the 1999 revisions include the restriction of public participation, little action concerning the participation of Native Americans and Hawaiians, and the handover of more power to agencies and SHPOs (King 2000).

The National Register Nomination Process and Structure

According to the National Park Service’s publication Guidelines for Completing National Register of Historic Places Forms, the National Register “is the official Federal list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture” (National Park Service 1997, 1). The National Register addresses objects and places that have significance to American history including “association with historic events or activities, association with important persons, distinctive design or physical characteristics, or the potential to provide important information about prehistory of history” (National Park Service 1997, 1). In order for a property to be included in the National Register, it must meet at least one of these criteria for significance. In addition to significance, any National Register listing must possess integrity. Integrity “is the authenticity of a property’s historic identity evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property’s prehistoric or historic period” (National Park Service 1997, 4).

The main document for any listing in the National Register is the nomination form. In order to be listed, every property must have a nomination prepared submitted for review. National Register nomination forms include the following information: name of property, locations, classification type, function or use, description, statement of significance, bibliographical references, geographical data, preparer information, and any
other additional documentation needed such as photos, maps or sketches (see National Register example in Appendix A) (National Park Service 1997).

During the planning and documentation stages of nominating a property, a preparer decides which type of resource is at hand. The National Park Service recognizes buildings, sites, structures, objects, and districts (National Park Service 1997). Buildings are places that allow for human activity, such as a home, barn, or church. Structures relate to objects such as dams, silos, or roadways that do not house human activity. Objects include monuments, boundary markers, or fountains. For this study, the last two resource types are of particular importance since they most directly relate to landscape preservation. Sites and districts are resource types that directly involve landscapes at various scales. Sites can be very small, such as a Native American burial ground, to large battlefields, such as Gettysburg. Districts usually have a diverse group of resources. Examples of districts include agricultural landscapes, college campuses, industrial complexes, villages, business districts, and transportation networks. The focus of this research is rural historic districts.

**The National Register and Historic Landscapes**

At its creation in 1966, the National Register was tailored for architectural and archeological resources, but as time passed additional elements, such as such as historic districts and rural historic districts were incorporated. Today, over eighty thousand properties are listed accounting for 1.4 million individual resources (National Park Service 2010). The National Register is administered by the National Park Service which relies on State Historic Preservation Officers, Federal Preservation Officers, and Tribal Preservation Officers to nominate properties for listing. New nominations are reviewed by a board of professionals, including architects, historians, archeologists, and landscape
architects, who form recommendations for eligibility based on the nominations they receive (National Park Service 1997).

In order to nominate a property, a National Register registration form must be submitted to the state preservation office. The form identifies and locates a specific property, explains how it meets particular National Register criteria, and what significance it holds that makes it worthy for listing (National Park Service 1997; Pickens 1998). In addition to the narrative and general information, the nomination includes site photos, location map, and references used to supplement any descriptions within the registration form.

The National Register process for nominating and documenting landscapes has mixed perceptions and is evolving. Early landscape nominations failed to mention landscape characteristics contextually but instead referenced the specifics of the built environment, such as a designed garden or landscape directly neighboring a building (Goetcheus 2002). To remedy weak landscape narratives, the National Park Service published several bulletins explaining the unique nature of different nomination types including, How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (1990), Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places (1992), and Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes (1989). Goetcheus agrees that these bulletins have greatly improved the quality of landscape nominations over the past decade but argues that a stronger landscape vocabulary needs to be created and used by preservationists (Goetcheus 2002).

**Rural Historic Districts in the National Register**

What is a rural historic landscape? According to the National Park Service publication Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes, a rural historic district is a “geographical area that historically has been used by people, or shaped or
modified by human activity, occupancy, or intervention, and that possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of areas of land use, vegetation, buildings, structures, roads and waterways, and natural features” (National Park Service 1999, 2). Rural landscapes reflect everyday occupations and activities including mining, industry, recreation, transportation, fishing and agriculture (National Park Service 1999). Unlike designed historic landscapes, rural landscapes are not usually the result of professional intervention or planning, but instead exhibit the work of local people.

Rural historic districts go through the same review and nomination process as other resources in the National Register. However, rural historic districts are evaluated and analyzed using a different set of characteristics than those used for other traditional resources in the National Register. The National Park Service lists eleven landscape characteristics in which “human use or activity is examined” including land use and activities, spatial organization, response to natural environment, cultural traditions, circulation networks, boundary demarcations, vegetation related to land use, the built environment, clusters, archeological sites, and small scale elements (National Park Service 1999, 3).

Robert Melnick, a professor at the University of Washington, published Cultural Landscapes: Rural Historic Districts in the National Park System in 1984. In his work, Melnick stated that there are landscapes that “we look at every day, but that we never really see” (Melnick 1984, 1). He argued that rural landscapes are “unrecognized, misunderstood, unprotected and mismanaged” (Melnick 1984, 1). In light of these observations, Melnick’s intent for the publication was to propose a framework from which decisions concerning the recognition, preservation and protection of rural landscapes in the National Park System could be understood and employed. A few years later, Melnick’s suggestions were expanded in the 1989 publication Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes.
A widely known example of a National Register rural historic district is Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve, located on Whidbey Island, Washington. Ebey’s Landing is significant due to its “unbroken vistas of active open farmland, views to water and mountain ranges east and west, an impressive collection of historic buildings and farm structures, a readable spatial structure of land division dating from the 1850s, and a mosaic of landscapes that include mature second growth woodlands, prairie remnants, wetlands, beaches, bluffs and fertile agricultural land” (Rottle 2003, 7). It is also one of the earliest rural historic districts, nominated in 1978.

In 2003, Nancy Rottle, a professor at the University of Washington and partner for Jones and Jones Landscape Architects, Ltd, prepared a study in which she examined the effectiveness of management strategies to preserve the historic landscape at Ebey’s Landing (Rottle 2003, Rottle 2008). The study assessed landscape change between 1950 and 2003. The report revealed that current management strategies were not adequately preserving historic landscape characteristics and stronger protection measures would be needed if the rural historic district wanted to retain its historic integrity and significance. Rottle’s methods and findings are discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.

**Historic Landscapes Research and Literature**

The modern study of cultural landscapes began with early geographers such as Carl Sauer who understood landscapes as an outcome of factors that evolved over time to produce distinct forms and character (Sauer 1925). Preservationists and academics began focusing on the act of preserving historic landscapes in the early 1970s in writings about how we value, read, and interpret landscapes (Lowenthal 1975; Tishler 1979; Lewis 1972, Jackson 1979). Lewis and Jackson wrote about how we can “read” landscapes, not only historic landscapes but the everyday landscapes we live and work in. In their
work, Lewis and Jackson recognized that even the blandest everyday landscapes had a story to tell. Lowenthal and Meinig focused on how people perceive landscapes and what values they assign to them.

The early 1970s saw growth in landscape preservation groups such as The Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation (AHLP) in 1978, as well as revamped missions to preserve landscapes in government entities such as the National Park Service. Several journals began publication in this era including Association for Preservation Technology (APT) in 1968 and Cultural Resources Management (CRM) in 1978. However, this growing body of knowledge did not translate to an increase in landscape nominations in the historic register. The bulk of preservation activity during the early 1970s was primarily concerned with architecture as seen in the number of landscape oriented listings in both the Historic American Landscape Surveys as well as the National Register itself.

An explanation for the low landscape oriented National Register nominations may be attributed to the general confusion among preservation resources. Historic landscape preservation resources found at the National Park Service and the National Register do not agree on a standard terminology that is to be used during the nomination or identification of historic landscapes. For instance, the National Park Service divides historic landscapes into four categories (historic sites, historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, and ethnographic landscapes) while the National Register lists five resource types (districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects) with all landscapes listed under either districts or sites (Goetcheus 2002).

In addition to confusion between preservation terminologies, a bigger issue may be the resource itself. Any landscape undergoes change from any number of sources. Private landowners may decide to subdivide their property into additional lots, lightning may strike a tree, or a farmer may expand his operation by building additional farm buildings. If the main goal of preservation activities is to preserve any given resource, how does one
manage for landscape change? Many landscape preservationists support the view that historic landscapes must change in order to retain their character (Melnick 2008; Rottle 2008; Page et al. 1998; Longstreth 2008). National Park literature suggests, “the appropriate level of change in a cultural landscape is closely related to its significance” (Page et al. 1998). Preservationists recognize that landscape significance is embodied over long periods as an intertwined story extending to modern times (Melnick 2008; Birnbaum 1993).

Although the National Register considers resources less than fifty years old “modern” and not eligible for National Register status, some preservationists support the “continuum” approach which recognizes that cultural activity does not lose meaning if less than fifty years old, but events and interventions up to the present day add to the rich historic narrative of a rural agricultural landscape (Rottle 2008). Rottle references excerpts from landscape historians, Melody Webb and Catherine Howett, who agree that the fifty-year rule is a perfect example of how the National Register falls short in recognizing the dynamic natural of historic landscapes. Webb and Howett argue that applying the fifty-year rule to an agricultural landscape creates misinterpretations. For example, a new shiny metal barn for raising chickens falls short of the 50-year rule, but on the other hand, the new metal barn helps support a local agricultural system and mimics similar land use patterns from the past. Rottle points out some activities on Ebey’s Landing include new farming niches such as llama husbandry. Llama husbandry seems out of place but it reflects the Island’s history of sheep farming with its similar land use patterns and landscape character. Similarly, modern farm buildings may look very different from historic farm buildings, but farmers need to update buildings to fit modern agricultural needs. Even though there may be shiny metal buildings next to some silos and a historic bank barn, the sense of character and history is still evident.
Preservation Values

A current theme in preservation theory and practice is community values. Spennemann argues that there is a known value to preservation due to the existence of international charters and national laws, but a more important question to ask is “which past do we preserve” (Spennemann 2006, 6). Spennemann notes, “there are a multitude of pasts and the past we tend to preserve is often the sanitized one, the safe and comfortable one; the past that we can visit akin to a foreign country, safe in the knowledge that, should we suddenly feel uncomfortable, we can return to the present” (Spennemann 2006, 6).

Many preservationists and individuals subscribe to the notion that preservation benefits future generations, but this view is not universal. Spennemann argues, “Individuals hold different values with varying strengths of conviction” (Spennemann 2006, 7). As a result, values tend to be very fluid and change frequently. Values can change due to political, social, and economic influences (Spennemann 2006; Mason 2006). Likewise, the places we choose to preserve can gain or lose value in light of these influences. In effect, there is no way to know what will be valued by future generations, or under what conditions these values will form.

What do we preserve places for if not for future generations? Historic preservation provides a link to our past and forms a sense of identity and attachment for particular groups or societies (Spennemann 2006). Attachment to place can create a strong interest to preserve places; places such as residences, work place, and even places where emotional events happened (Spennemann 2006). For example, studies have shown that relocated communities fare much better when some tangible part of their past is preserved, such as an old church or monument, than communities with no vestige of their past (Spennemann 2006). If not for future generations, historic preservation provides sociological benefits for present communities.
Others take a different approach in describing the value of preserving historic places. Stokes et al. describe the value of preserving the countryside from the viewpoint of conservation practices. The countryside provides recreational opportunities, rich farmland, and areas for historical exploration, but they also connect people to significant historic periods that shape the world we live in (Stokes et al. 1997). Stokes et al. bring attention to the various motives for preservation action, which include the fear of losing scenic views, loss of productive farmland, or the demolition of a historic building (Stokes et al. 1997). This range of preservation motives shows the complexity of values any place could have.

**Research Gaps**

While the amount of information pertaining to historic rural landscapes is extensive, there are gaps. One of which is there is little information about what happens after a place is nominated and included in the National Register. With the exception of a few instances, such as the Ebey’s landing study published in 2003, little is known about the effects of National Register Status in rural historic districts. In order to help fill this gap, additional studies similar to the Ebey’s Landing study should be completed to understand the complexity of site specific landscape change that affects rural historic districts. There are many generalizations about landscape change which could be true for any area any time, but every area has its own influencing factors that aid or prohibit landscape change and produce different outcomes. As Robert Melnick notes, “[w]hen we ask the same question about people and place, we run the risk of arriving at the same conclusions, and in so doing, we fail to understand the complex relationship of people and landscape” (Melnick 2008, 205).
Chapter 3

Research Methods

Introduction

The following chapter provides a two part framework of Oley Township’s historic landscape characteristics and current preservation policies, programs and initiatives. The first section describes how Oley was selected out of other rural historic district like areas within Pennsylvania. From this point, the study is organized into two parts; one which focuses on historic characteristics and another which focuses on the specific preservation programs. Together, these three parts will help answer why Oley Township is historically significant and how it preserved its rural heritage.

Selection of the Research Area

As part of the research, other rural historic districts in the United States were studied. The National Register database of registered properties provided data on other States’ rural historic district listings, i.e., where rural historic districts are located and the information included in National Register nomination forms. The second part of the study focused on Pennsylvania. Using the same National Register database, all Pennsylvania rural historic districts over 5,000 acres were listed for further inquiry (A threshold of 5,000 acres to develop a list of rural historic districts would be more likely to have a range of issues and resources to draw from). The research goal was to find districts with similar historic significance – which was not too difficult because all existing rural historic districts in Pennsylvania focus on agriculture, architecture, and industry to varying degrees. The list comprised eight agricultural rural historic districts,
all located in southeastern Pennsylvania. Site visits, aerial photography, National Register nomination forms, and web-based research provided more details about preservation issues within these areas throughout Pennsylvania.

From the initial portion of the study, Oley Township and Tulpehocken Rural Historic Districts (both located in Berks County, Pennsylvania) were selected. After review of both of these places, Oley Township was selected due to its large land area and the complexity of issues documented during a field visit in spring 2010. Tulpehocken RHD was eliminated because most of the historic district was out of view from public roadways. When it was nominated in the 1980’s, Phoebe Hopkins (same preparer for Oley Township Historic District) had to photograph the properties from a canoe. On the other hand, Oley Township encompassed an entire township making field studies and research more efficient. Additionally, prior knowledge of Oley, and discussions with Hugh Miller, played an important role in its selection1.

Following the preliminary study, a number of visits were made to Oley Township to understand its current landscape issues. On two site visits, suburban sprawl around the town of Oley seemed to be the most obvious issue, but some subtle changes included alterations to historic farmstead buildings, general commercial/civic development and the relocation and expansion of area schools in rural areas. Although shallow in terms of research depth, this process helped build a foundation of site understanding has proven to be useful when thinking about possible direction of inquiry or when trying to locate a resource on an aerial photo.

1 I met Hugh Miller at the 2010 Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation (AHLP) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Mr. Miller was a former chief historical architect for the National Park Service and is now a professor and thesis advisor at Goucher College.
Analyzing the National Register Nomination for Oley Township

The next research method involved a detailed study of Oley’s National Register nomination form to identify those landscape elements that create Oley’s rural and historic character. The 1982 National Register nomination form provided an understanding of what was seen as important both through landscape elements identified as well as the content that the preparer found important to include in the document.

The general content of the nomination form includes valuable information that documents public/community reactions to preservation issues forming over twenty years ago. For example, the “intrusions” section discusses various new residential/commercial developments throughout the district. The report describes how concentrated suburban type development appeared around the small town of Oley and along the then “new” Route 73, a highway that cuts across the valley north to south. In addition to residential development, Route 73 is noted for creating other issues such as increased commercial development and associated impacts from infrastructure development, including sewage systems and new access roads to developments. The second type of development identified in the National Register nomination is sporadic residential development along township roads where farmers or large hand holders subdivided their land holdings into smaller lots for housing.

Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve Case Study

In 2003, Nancy Rottle, a professor at the University of Washington and partner for Jones and Jones Landscape Architects, Ltd, prepared a study in which she examined the effectiveness of management strategies to preserve the historic landscape at Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve (Rottle 2008). The study assessed landscape change between 1950 and 2003. She used a variety of information including local zoning laws,
Nation Park management plans, aerial photos, and site visits to assess how the landscape changed and to what degree National Park Service management policies proved effective for landscape preservation. Rottle asked the following questions:

1) What patterns of landscape change have taken place since the initial cultural landscape inventory in 1983, what contemporary pressures do these patterns suggest, and what forces might compromise the future integrity of the reserve’s landscape?

2) What characteristics from the historic landscape (from 50 years earlier) still remain and contribute to the historic integrity of the Reserve, as defined in the Department of the Interior’s guidelines for evaluating historic and cultural landscapes?

3) What are innovative preservation strategies used in other parts of the U.S. especially as applied to agricultural and forested working landscape, and how might lessons from these precedents be applied to the reserve? (Rottle 2003: 7)

In addition to these research questions, another goal was to create a new benchmark for future studies of the reserve. The product of this study was an up-to-date land use and landscape survey (Rottle 2003).

Information System (GIS) documented how each of these categories changed over the nearly twenty-year period (Rottle 2003).

In second part of the pre-1950 to 2000 cultural landscape integrity assessment, Rottle focused on the historic integrity of landscape elements. She applied eight landscape characteristics using the National Register of Historic Places’ framework for historic integrity. These characteristics included vegetation, circulation, spatial organization, land use, views and vistas, building sites, cluster arrangements, and natural systems and features (Rottle 2003: 8). Each characteristic was evaluated in terms of its existence since 1950 or before. Since historic benchmarks such as the 1983 buildings and landscape survey did not exist before 1950, Rottle relied on 1936 USGS quad maps and Government Land Ordinance survey notes to make observations. Recent resources such as a 1983 and 1995 National Park Service building inventory and the National Register of Historic Places also yielded valuable historic context.

Once both parts were completed, Rottle defined what constituted the retention of historic integrity in Ebey’s Landing (Rottle 2003). It was determined that at least 50% of any historic resource existing before 1950 must exist in the present landscape (Rottle 2003: 9). Using this methodology, Rottle concluded that all the landscape characteristics in Ebey’s Landing retained their historic integrity; however patterns of suburbanization, land use change, and shifts in agricultural markets could create issues in the future if current management policies were not changed.

While the Ebey’s landing study provides a solid methodology (which could replicated for Oley’s historic landscape), this study only borrows sparingly. The Ebey’s Landing study took several years. In light of time restraints this study, the focus is on what is considered historic, to what degree these historic features have been preserved, and lastly, what management strategies have fostered preservation activity.
Data

The data for this research came from both primary and secondary sources. The Oley Township National Register nomination provided the basis to select all other data. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data provides building footprints, parcels, boundaries, and roadways. GIS data also provided the means for the creation of a base map using National Agriculture Imagery Program aerial photos. Other sources included historic aerial photos from Penn Pilot, a historic photography service operated by Penn State; individuals involved with the original nomination in 1982; and primary resources such as the 1876 Historical Atlas of Berks County.

In most cases the data used in this study was collected from site visits and government sources including ordinances, zoning regulations, and farmland preservation programs.

Structure

The study is organized into two phases: Phase I: Project Development and Exploration; and Phase 2: Preservation Strategies. Phase I documents the process of exploring Pennsylvania rural historic districts for context and expanding on available information on Oley Township. Phase II focuses on local initiatives that led to Oley’s current intact historic landscape. These initiatives include national register status, comprehensive planning, local ordinances, zoning regulations, and farmland preservation programs.
Phase I: Project Development

Phase I consisted of identifying data and information sources for use in the study, as well as creating a base map. The first resource consulted was the National Register nomination form for Oley Township. The National Register information for Oley was found at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission’s web-based program CRGIS; a GIS based information system for historic resources throughout Pennsylvania. CRGIS not only contained the 1982 National Register nomination for Oley, but some photographs from the nomination process depicting important aspects of the landscape.

Key community organizations in the project area were identified for potential sources and data each could lend to the study. Organizations including Berks County, The Historical Society of Berks County, Berks County Conservancy, and Oley Township operate websites with valuable regional information. The Oley Township website contains a link listing all their ordinances including their ordinance for historic districts. The Berks County website contained the county’s comprehensive plan, planning maps, and information about existing farmland easement programs. Berks County Conservancy and the Historic Society of Berks County provided general historic context for the entire region and links to articles describing current preservation issues and community news. These websites and other sources were the primary data network for the study.

The final portion of the project development stage required the creation of a base map. Brad Shirley of Berks County GIS Department and request provided mapping data including roadways, buildings, parcels, zoning, easements and historic resources. With Berks County GIS Data, a base map was created and acted as a place for field observations.
Significant Historic Characteristics found in Oley Township

Oley Township’s 1982 National Register nomination was a critical source of data for the study. It included notable landscape characteristics, including settlement patterns, religion, agriculture, industry, and architecture. Each of the National Register nomination characteristic groups are evaluated in terms of the following National Park Service categories for historic landscapes: land use, vegetation related to land use, structures, circulation networks, and boundaries.

Oley Township Land Use

Land Uses are “the major human forces that shape and organize rural communities” (McClelland et al. 1999: 4). Land use examples include farming, mining, ranching, recreation, social events, commerce, or industry (McClelland et al. 1999). Investigating current land uses can help create a better understanding of historic land use practices and suggest what historic resources should be present in the landscape (McClelland et al. 1999). Land use change can occur when new technologies become available, economic conditions change, or through experiences of success or failure. Present land use patterns could be representative of historic ones or be a modern hybrid that supports a historic model (McClelland et al. 1999).

A review of local zoning laws is the first place for a general overview of current land uses. Oley Township has specific zoning laws available online. Oley passed zoning laws beginning in 1992 with several subsequent revisions. As McClelland et al. (1999) suggested earlier, current land uses can provide clues to historic land use patterns. The county level also has specific programs effecting land use in Oley including an Agricultural Easement Program and comprehensive plan which looks out to 2020.
Oley Township Vegetation Related to Land Use

Vegetation related to land use includes vegetation related to “long-established patterns of land use” (McClelland et al. 1999: 5). Examples include crops, trees, or shrubs, but can also include naturally occurring vegetation such as trees in a hedgerow or vegetation along a roadway. Vegetation grows and changes with time much faster than other landscape characteristics. Some vegetation only appears at certain times of the year including crops and flowering perennials. In addition, vegetation has the capability of deciphering historic land use patterns. For example, McClelland et al. use the example of how Eastern red cedars and aspens are usually the first species to take root in abandoned Midwestern farm fields. In the case of Oley Township, hedgerows continue to mark property boundaries, the edges of roadways and different farm fields.

Oley Township Buildings, Structures, and Objects

Buildings, Structures, and Objects are important landscape features because they reflect “historic activities, customs, tastes, and skills of the people who built and used them” (McClelland et al. 1999: 6). Buildings include any structure built to shelter human activity. Buildings can be homes, schools, churches, outbuildings, barns, stores, community halls, and train depots (McClelland et al. 1999). Structures include dams, canals, fencing, irrigation, tunnels, mining shafts, silos, bridges, ships, and highways (McClelland et al. 1999). Objects are moveable small-scale elements that include markers, monuments, machinery, and equipment (McClelland et al. 1999). The buildings, structures, and objects of any given historic area can help shed light on regional vernacular design. In addition, they can also suggest family size, population densities, and economic conditions (McClelland et al. 1999). Repetition of building materials and styles may suggest practical solutions for specific regions or the work of
local artisans (McClelland et al. 1999). In Oley Township, locals used limestone for building material and made their own clay tiles for roofs. The historic buildings in Oley’s countryside have a strong Germanic character with their steep roofs and details such as hex symbols and circular date stones located at the upper gable end of many historic barns in the area.

**Oley Township Circulation**

Circulation networks are “systems for transporting people, goods, and raw materials from one point to another” (McClelland et al. 1999: 5). Circulation networks can be internal or external in nature. Internal networks include farm roads that connected local communities where external networks, such as a railroad, connected local communities to other regions (McClelland et al. 1999). Circulation networks usually undergo some sort of modification within their history including road widening, realignment, or closure. The existing circulation system in Oley looks much like it appeared in the 1876 Berks County Atlas.

**Oley Township Boundaries**

Boundaries mark limits of ownership or control, such as a township boundary or an entire farm. Hedgerows, fences, markers, creeks, rivers, ridgelines, and roadways are common boundary markers. Boundaries can also identify differing land uses, such as a fenced farm field or walled cemetery.

A 2008 parcel data layer for GIS created by Berks County GIS was used to investigate current land parcels. This map was used to identify post 1876 subdivisions and new developments. Key signatures of new development include cul-de-sacs and smaller than
average parcel sizes that stand out from larger historic parcels. Aerial photos also support findings from the GIS map. As a last measure, all identified sites were adjusted where needed on base map. Since the GIS building and parcel layer were four years old, new developments and other isolated new construction was found throughout the township.

**Phase II: Preservation Strategies**

Phase II examines local ordinances, zoning, farmland preservation initiatives, and other factors which contribute to Oley’s preservation status. Programs from each of the above categories were studied to gain a better understanding of what measures are in place to preserve Oley’s historic landscape features. Specific programs and factors examined include Oley Township Code of Ordinances, Oley Township zoning, and Berks County farmland preservation resources as they relate to activity in Oley Township. In addition, a variety of local initiatives including resident involvement in the preservation process, the Oley Valley Heritage Association, and the Oley Valley Fair were investigated.

**Limitations**

One of the major limitations realized in this study was the late realization that Oley’s current state of preservation did not revolve around the National Register, but instead a group of different preservation initiatives including farmland preservation, zoning ordinances, and local involvement. Although this late realization limited the amount of research that could have been done, it ended up leading to a clearer understanding of how a certain place proactively went about preserving their heritage. Originally, I pictured this study as a way assess how well Oley has preserved its historic character, but as this
study shows it took more of a case study approach which looked at how Oley is preserving its overall historic character.
Chapter 4

Part I: Project Background

Introduction

This chapter is organized into 3 sections focused on rural historic district characteristics in Pennsylvania. The first section covers Pennsylvania’s rural historic districts in terms of district size, district characteristics, and general National Register nomination information including the date the district was nominated and specific location. The second part examines Oley Township and its National Register nomination. This part references discussions with Phoebe Hopkins, the 1982 nomination preparer, and the specific characteristics found in the nomination document. The last section covers newspaper headlines over the past decade in an effort to become better acquainted with current happenings in Oley related to historic preservation activities. In its entirety, this chapter will answer what is historically significant in Oley Township as described in the 1982 National Register nomination and at present.

Pennsylvania Rural Historic Districts

Identifying rural historic districts in Pennsylvania is problematic. It is difficult to get an accurate number of rural historic districts in Pennsylvania due to different uses of National Register terminology. For instance, some places designated as a historic district actually fit the National Park Service’s definition of a rural historic district, as is the case with Oley Township. According to the National Park Service, a rural historic district is a “geographical area that historically has been used by people, or shaped or modified by human activity, occupancy, or intervention, and that possesses a significant
concentration, linkage, or continuity of areas of land use, vegetation, buildings, structures, roads and waterways, and natural features” (National Park Service 1999: 2). For example, Oley Township is a historic district according to its National Register nomination, but it is clear that it has strong rural historic district qualities.

Pennsylvania rural historic districts were identified using the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission’s CRGIS online mapping tool. CRGIS is a mapping system that contains existing National Register listings and other historic properties worthy of future preservation identified by state preservation officers. I set a threshold of 5,000 acres for the identification of rural historic districts in Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, there are many smaller districts that seem rural, but the 5,000 acres threshold eliminated these from the study and focused on larger districts with a stronger agricultural presence. Using this threshold, eight rural historic districts in southeastern Pennsylvania were identified.

Each district identified was mapped and additional research provided data about the significance of each place. CRGIS also provided links to online nomination materials including photographs and National Register documentation. HABS and HALS also contained documentation and photographs; however this information was usually focused on a single resource, usually a significant house or structure, rather than an entire district or site.

Figure 1: Pennsylvania Rural Historic Districts
### Pennsylvania Rural Historic Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Rural Historic District Name</th>
<th>Land Area</th>
<th>Contributing Properties</th>
<th>Non-contributing Properties</th>
<th>Area of Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gardenville-North Branch Rural Historic District</td>
<td>6,000 acres</td>
<td>307 buildings, 18 structures</td>
<td>39 buildings, 3 structures</td>
<td>Architecture and Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Middle Pickering Rural Historic District</td>
<td>10,550 acres</td>
<td>76 buildings, 15 structures</td>
<td>20 buildings, 2 structures</td>
<td>Architecture, Agriculture, and Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Okeechobee Historic District</td>
<td>14,000 acres</td>
<td>65 buildings, 2 structures, 1 object</td>
<td>24 buildings, 3 sites, 4 structures</td>
<td>Architecture, Agriculture, and Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Oley Rural Historic District</td>
<td>15,650 acres</td>
<td>451 buildings, 19 structures</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Architecture, Agriculture, Industry, and Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ridge Valley Rural Historic District</td>
<td>5,750 acres</td>
<td>66 buildings, 15 structures, 7 sites, 2 objects</td>
<td>9 buildings, 1 structure</td>
<td>Architecture and Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tulpehocken Creek Historic District</td>
<td>17,000 acres</td>
<td>353 buildings, 4 structures</td>
<td>50 buildings</td>
<td>Architecture, Agriculture, Industry, Exploration, Commerce, Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>West Vincent Highlands Historic District</td>
<td>19,044 acres</td>
<td>347 buildings, 7 sites, 6 structures</td>
<td>50 buildings, 5 structures</td>
<td>Architecture and Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Worth-Jeffers Rural Historic District</td>
<td>18,000 acres</td>
<td>42 buildings, 5 sites</td>
<td>69 buildings, 5 structures</td>
<td>Architecture, Agriculture, and Exploration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Pennsylvania Rural Historic Districts: District Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Rural Historic District Name</th>
<th>Registration Date</th>
<th>Preparer</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gardenville-North Branch Rural Historic District</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Kathryn Auerbach</td>
<td>Plumstead Township Civic Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Middle Pickering Rural Historic District</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Estelle Cremers</td>
<td>French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Okeechobee Historic District</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Jane Darcey</td>
<td>Willistown Township</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Oley Rural Historic District</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Phoebe Hopkins</td>
<td>Oley Township Resource Conservation Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ridge Valley Rural Historic District</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Robert Reynolds</td>
<td>Bucks County Conservancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tulpehocken Creek Historic District</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Phoebe Hopkins</td>
<td>Bucks County Conservancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>West Vincent Highlands Historic District</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Estelle Cremers</td>
<td>French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Worth-Jeffers Rural Historic District</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Robert Wise</td>
<td>Brandywine Conservancy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: National Register Preparers for Pennsylvania Rural Historic Districts

Table 2 lists the eight rural historic districts identified in this research. In addition, each rural historic district’s nomination date and preparer are noted. The range of years is limited to two periods: One period in the early 1980s and another in the early 1990s.
**Oley’s National Register Nomination**

Community efforts to nominate Oley Township as a Historic District became a reality in March 1980 when the National Trust for Historic Preservation selected the township’s application as a demonstration community for the “Rural Project” program. The National Trust established the Rural Project in 1979 to provide advice, training, and publications to spur preservation activity in rural areas (National Trust 2005). The Rural Project linked historic preservation with broader planning and environmental issues. While the National Trust served as the main coordinator, the Rural Project placed a strong emphasis on local volunteer participation. Between 1980 and 1982, demonstration projects in Oley and Cazenovia, New York were selected to show “how historic resources could be identified and protected” (National Trust 2005).

According to a 1981 issue of *PA Township News*, Hilda Fisher, an Oley Valley native, noted locals became interested in the Rural Project and its opportunities when they noticed their springs “drying up” (PA Township News 1981). In 1978, a small stream and several springs dried up suspiciously around the time a new quarry opened (Stokes et al. 1997). In addition to water concerns, township residents were worried about threats to Oley’s historic architecture and fertile limestone farmland. Ultimately, the Rural Project in Oley consisted of four stages, each with a corresponding project group. The four groups were: 1) a historic resource group focused on creating an inventory of historic resources, 2) an agricultural group focused on interviewing local farmers concerning their farming practices and opinions on farmland preservation, 3) a visual qualities group who photographed of Oley’s natural scenery, and 4) a natural resources group who developed maps depicting Oley’s water resources (PA Township News 1981).

The historic resource group was responsible for the National Register nomination for Oley Township in 1982. The Berks County Conservancy headed this phase of the Rural
Project. One of the lead field investigators and preparer for the National Register nomination was Phoebe Hopkins. She was responsible for photographing and recording Oley’s historic resources. Besides creating a photograph collection which captures Oley’s historic character, Mrs. Hopkins helped create the historic inventory map shown in figure 2 on page 39.

Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins were interviewed in March 2012 to discuss their reflections and prior involvement with the Rural Project. Mrs. Hopkins has a long lineage of Oley valley ancestors, namely the Bertolet family who settled throughout the township in the eighteenth century. In the context of Oley’s religious history, the Bertolet family were Huguenots who came to Pennsylvania as religious refugees early in our nation’s history.

Mrs. Hopkins shared photos of Oley Township in the early 1980s, various publications produced by the Berks County Historical Society, and a three ring binder containing 60 photos used for the Rural Project and National Register nomination. These photos are black and white as prescribed by the National Register. The photos from over 30 years ago looked very familiar to the photographs I took in the days before this meeting. Some photos showed what new development in 1982 looked like – stark looking buildings in a landscape devoid of any vegetation except for freshly seeded lawns and a few trees. Photos I took in these same areas looked less threatening because mature trees now exist and the homes have been personalized over the past thirty years.

According to Mrs. Hopkins, the National Register nomination did have a major impact on preservation activities in the valley, but strict zoning laws and farmland easement programs proved to be the most effective outcomes in preservation efforts. Mr. Hopkins, a current member of the Berks County planning commission, commented that most of the developable lands, as prescribed by Oley Township zoning laws were already currently developed. Oley’s zoning board has the reputation to not make variations to its zoning laws.
The main document for Oley Township Historic District is its National Register nomination form. Like any National Register nomination, it contains basic location information, references to other surveys, a description of historic significance, and a list of referenced material. During the March 2012 interview, Hopkins noted that the Oley National Register nomination was one of the first nominations to consider historic landscape characteristics. The following section discusses the nomination in detail and assesses its content for landscape oriented content.

**Significance**

Although the Pennsylvania Germanic farming culture is common in southeastern Pennsylvania, Oley developed a unique identity due its location in a bowl-shaped valley, geographically isolated from other farming regions. According to Oley’s National Register Nomination, ninety percent of Oley’s land area in 1982 remained in similar land uses since its settlement over three centuries ago. Woven in this historic cultural landscape are six principal villages, dozens of 18th century farm buildings, covered bridges, burial grounds, and gristmills connected by hedgerows, farm fields and a circulation system much like it appeared two centuries ago. The following section expands on Oley’s significance by identifying the historic features found in Oley Township’s 1982 National Register nomination document.
The above map depicts the locations of Oley’s buildings and structures in the National Register document. Each property was evaluated in terms of whether or not it contributed to Oley’s historic character. Instead of looking at each structure or building individually, this survey assigned a value to an entire site. Each site was labeled accordingly with the following characterizations: exceptional, significant, contributing, non-conforming, and non-contributing. Non-contributing structures are clustered around the existing towns of Oley and Pleasantville. In some instances, small groups of non-contributing housing have developed along rural roadways.

Figure 2: Historic Resources in Oley Township, 1982

Source: National Register
Oley’s Historic Characteristics Identified in the National Register Nomination

Settlement and Religion

Oley’s first settlers were religious refugees from European religious sects including the Quakers, Huguenots, and various reformation movements from Switzerland and Germany including the Moravians, Lutherans, and the Reformed Church. The earliest settlers “founded [families] here that have remained for generation after generation” (Hopkins 1982). In addition, Hopkins notes that “patterns were established in fields and boundaries that persist to this day” (Hopkins 1982). By the time Oley was chartered as a township in 1740, over 40 farms were already well established and specializing in a “craft” or “specialty” product (Hopkins 1982).

Another important point Hopkins makes in the Oley National Register nomination is about the region’s enduring ethics. “One can speculate that Oley is what it is today because of the quality of heritage – the value system handed down through the generations, starting with the first settlers. The work ethic, the conservation ethic, the desire for independence and self-sufficiency – all are deep-rooted here. Through most of its existence, it has been a place of “Oley Families” holding to their heritage. For this reason there is unity and integrity to be found in its culture” (Hopkins 1982). As a person familiar with Oley’s heritage and history, Mrs. Hopkins’ observation begins to describe a system of values which has helped preserve Oley Township over the last few centuries.

From the March 2012 field observations, Lutheran and United Church of Christ (UCC) churches appear to have longevity in the valley; other non-denominational and a Mennonite church have appeared within the last 50 years. Most of the small towns, namely Oley, Pleasantville and Spangsville have historic churches located within the
town boundaries. A few large and modern churches, which tend to be non-denominational, are located near Oley, but nowhere else in the valley.

Almost all the small family cemeteries in Oley are enclosed with a low (2-3 foot) stone rubble wall and are not associated with any specific church. Most of the small family cemeteries in Oley are well tended, but there were some which were overgrown with brush. Most of the small family cemeteries appear to have been associated with a single nearby farm due to their isolated locations and placement amid active farm fields. In one instance, a cemetery was moved due to quarrying activities but before the completion of the National Register nomination in 1982.

At Salem United Church of Christ, part of the original eighteenth and nineteenth century cemetery was relocated to make way for a new $640,000 church addition. The new addition, which was constructed to provide room for religious programs and attract new members, necessitated the moving of 158 burials which were then placed into a common grave (Devlin 2002). By a 2 to 1 vote ratio, the 350 member church decided to go ahead with the project (Devlin 2002). The Philadelphia firm Kise Straw and Kolodner headed the project and employed a dozen archeologists, some of which were Berks County natives. The original tombstones were used for a small memorial, although some of the larger stones remained propped up against the church foundation in 2012. The memorial consists of a circular array of the original tombstones which surround a central sitting/viewing area. In addition to the memorial, there is a small memorial stone which recalls the events which led to the moving of these burial sites.
Figures 3 and 4 depict aspects of Oley’s religious history and customs. Figure 3 shows the Salem United Church of Christ in the foreground, and Christ Lutheran Church in the background. Both churches share a common cemetery directly behind the churches. Figure 4 shows one of the many stone walled family cemeteries found throughout the valley. For the most part, family cemeteries here are located within farm fields within view of local roadways.
Agriculture

According to the nomination, the valley’s limestone soils were the primary attraction for the Germanic setters. Families knew that they could farm in Oley and work the soil for generations (a reason the area still exhibits a strong Pennsylvania German heritage). The settlers also understood that the soil needed amendments to keep its fertility. This spurred the development of lime kilns to “sweeten the soil.”

The organization of farms was thoroughly planned creating distinct farmstead layouts and practical farm buildings. The different types of farm buildings begin to hint at historic crop patterns. For example, a relationship can be seen between wheat production and the seven remaining grist mills in Oley (although not in operation in 1982) (Hopkins 1982).

The nomination begins to describe a complexity of barn styles found at Oley. In an inventory created for the nomination in 1982, over 160 historic farm complexes were identified. Among these 160 historic farms, 37 were constructed in the eighteenth century and another 116 farms were constructed in the nineteenth century. The other seven remaining complexes could have been constructed in the early twentieth century, but this is not explicitly noted. Hopkins notes that the range of barn styles differs among all 160 historic farm complexes, and a study of these differences could be “as comprehensive as any such studies done in the whole state [of Pennsylvania]” (Hopkins 1982).

In the nomination, Hopkins includes an interesting analysis of how the Hoch Farm changed over the past century based on an 1882 sketch drawn by Ferdinand Brader, an artist who drew accurate farm sketches across Pennsylvania and several other states. The 1882 sketch illustrated orchards, gardens, fenced enclosures, and “more mechanized components like silos and milking facilities” (Hopkins 1982). Hopkins noted in 1982 that the Hoch farm had fewer “labor-intensive adjuncts” but still retained its historic
buildings which she noted were “indicative not only of adaptive use but of family pride” (Hopkins 1982). This latter point reinforces the earlier anecdote about Oley’s residents exhibiting a conservation ethic.

During a farm site visit in March 2012, a young Mennonite boy at a farm in northeastern Oley Township pointed out that this particular pig pen was constructed over a spring to keep the pigs cool. He also noted that the springhouse was just a “large refrigerator”. He was also surprised that the current Mennonite owners (who had just bought the farm from an eleventh generation Oley farmer) did not use the historic smokehouse because all the parts were in working condition. He mentioned that current owners were going to build a new cow shed to replace a dilapidated structure built a few decades ago.

The March 2012 Oley visit also recorded the presence of new farm structures that include large chicken barns and other large structures associated with modern farm practices. Some historic farm complexes have become undistinguishable with new farm buildings. On some historic farm complexes, newer buildings blended with historic farm buildings due to design choices as simple as building color and architectural form (e.g., a steeper pitch roof which mimics a historic Oley barn). The presence of newer farm buildings in historic farm complexes conveys a sense that Oley remains productive and will continue to be productive as Oley’s farmers invest in their farm’s future.
Figure 5 shows one of the many forgotten lime kilns in Oley. Most of these lime kilns have blended into overgrown woodlots and hedge rows, while some are located right along roadways. Figure 6 shows the Kauffman farm which has a great variety of out buildings and two substantial stone barns. Oley’s oldest barn, dating to 1730, is located at the Kauffman farm.
Figure 7: 1882 Ferdinand Brader Drawing of the Hoch Farm
Industry

The Oley landscape fostered a mix of historic industries including various milling operations, iron production, charcoal production, and lime production. Milling operations included lumber, oil, fulling, paper, and red ochre mills (in addition to several grist mills that processed agricultural products). Two iron-works communities, Spangsville and Oley Furnace, each had large iron master mansions, gristmills, with general stores, taverns, and worker homes. The Spang family of Spangsville boasted a mansion as well as a four level wine cellar\(^2\). Oley Furnace was one of the iron furnaces which produced bullets for the American Revolution. The iron-works communities were situated with large forest tracts used in the production of charcoal for the iron industry. Finally, lime kilns once dotted the landscape for the production of agricultural lime. Although all of these industries no longer operate, the ruins and landmarks associated with these industries help narrate a story about former industrial enterprises in Oley.

The presence of Oley’s historic industries is not as obvious as its agricultural heritage. In March 2012, I was able to find clues about iron making but only because I was looking for them. There is a 1930s grain and feed store in Oley Township’s northeastern corner, seven gristmills and the occasional sighting of a lime kiln within a hedgerow which hint at past industries. For the most part, memorial markers (such as in Figure 9) are all that’s left to help narrate the story of Oley’s past industries.

\(^2\) The National Register nomination form mentions a four level wine cellar at the Sprang Mansion but does not explicitly say that locals made their own wine. It seems likely that Oley residents had the means to make their own wine due to the presence of such a large wine cellar and probably had vineyards at one time.
Figure 8: Bertolet Grist Mill near Oley

Figure 9: Oley Furnace Memorial Marker

Figure 8 depicts the Bertolet Grist Mill right outside the town of Oley. Like the other seven remaining grist mills in Oley Township, the Bertolet Grist Mills has three main floors and a partial fourth floor. Figure 9 shows one of Oley’s many historic markers. This figure shows a historic marker for the Oley Furnace, which produced bullets for the American Revolutionary War.
Architecture

The National Register nomination form called out the unique architectural expression and use of native materials in Oley’s historic buildings. Oley’s early architecture is sometimes defined as “transitional style” which describes the gradual change from chimney centered homes to more balanced Georgian homes with chimneys at the gable ends (Hopkins 1982). In addition to this change, Georgian homes in Oley exhibit extensive detailing in exterior millwork credited to the work of Gottlieb Drexel, a local builder.

The people who resided in the valley had a strong conviction to be self-sufficient which was translated in their extensive use of native materials for construction. One such example is the Oley clay tiles that were used for roofing material. The nomination form noted that 38 examples of tile roofs still existed in 1982 (Hopkins 1982).

Another portion of the nomination called out Oley’s earliest stone cabins which are “noteworthy for their integrity, adaptation to site, and expressive use of materials” (Hopkins 1982). The nomination notes, “[These buildings] illustrate the early chapters in America… the expression of a people who still cherished fresh memories of their homeland” (Hopkins 1982). These buildings include the Abraham Bertolet cabin, the Jacob Stauber cabin, the DeTurk house, the Levan House, and the entire Kauffman farm (which is partially pictured in the agricultural section in Figure 6).

In March 2012, it seemed like there fewer examples of Oley clay tile roofs than the 38 noted in 1982. This observation could have resulted from the lack of access to farms not visible from local roadways. Each farm complex or home throughout Oley had some distinct detail that differed from the one next to it. There was something to discover with every structure. Some residential homes and many barns have stones towards the upper point of the roof peak which detail the owner and date of construction. These date stones
were common on barns, where they were possibly made of old milling stones, but they are also found on the front of residential homes in the town of Oley.

In July 2010, the Coker family farm of Oley was highlighted in a web simulcast which toured historic Swiss style barns through the use of Skype, a live streaming video service online (Devlin 2010). Architectural historians, preservationists, artists and builders took part in a discussion where viewers could ask questions about barn design and history. The Coker family farm contains a 1787 Swiss style cantilevered barn, still in active use. In addition to the Coker’s barn, other Swiss style barns were highlighted in Canada and Switzerland. Jim Scherrer, president of the International Bundesbreif Society (a Swiss heritage group) which hosted the simulcast, noted, “Swiss barns reveal the footprint of migration for freedom and independence… and southeastern Pennsylvania is the mother lode of Swiss barns” (Devlin 2010). This quote begins to explain how historic architecture is not just about the structure itself but it can also help illustrate larger cultural patterns in a given region.
The figures above depict aspects of Oley’s unique architecture and the reliance on local materials. Figure 10 shows a clay tile roof on an old spring house. Clay tile roofs were heavy and required special construction. Each clay tile was grooved to direct water way from the gaps between each tile. Figure 11 shows a limestone grist mill. A majority of Oley’s barns and structures are constructed of limestone.
Oley’s National Register Nomination and its Cultural Landscape Content

The 1982 National Register nomination went beyond other National Register nominations of that era in explaining the relationship between the built environment and the landscape (a copy of the National Register nomination is included in Appendix A). The National Register nomination identified five characteristics critical to historic significance: Settlement, Religion, Agriculture, Architecture and Industry. Each were discussed in this chapter explain the general historic context of each characteristic with a corresponding example. Cultural landscape features were discussed in the context of local agricultural production and the use of local materials. Photos from the National Register nomination show additional cultural landscape features and are included in Appendix B.
Oley Township Today

Newspapers were the primary resources for current information concerning the Oley Township historic district. Newspaper content broke into three categories: 1) threats to historic resources, 2) preservation activities, and 3) miscellaneous local articles pertaining to historic resources. The following headlines and accompanying summaries provide examples for each category. The newspaper study focused on resources found since its inclusion in the National Register, but many of the articles found date to the last decade.

Several newspaper articles focused on threats or damage to historic resources. One of the more controversial topics dealt with a proposed subdivision on the former Cricket Slope Farm on the northwest boarder of the town of Oley (Wenger 2004). A proposed subdivision of 13 lots, which eventually became a reality, caused concerns about the contrast between new and historic homes near the town. A local citizen group, Friends of Cricket Slope, worked with developers to discuss what measures could be taken to minimize any conflict with the existing historic structures surround the site. In the end, the development went forth but the original farmhouse and barn were saved. The old farmhouse has been restored and now serves as an antique store but nothing has been done with the barn as of 2012. The housing development, however, conformed to the traditional suburban housing development model; complete with a cul-de-sac and similar looking house styles bearing no resemblance to local building customs or materials.

Other articles covered smaller threats to historic resources. One such instance was a story regarding a major storm toppling several century old trees onto a historic barn (Brudereck 2006). While no human caused this event, it shows how nature can play a role in preservation activities.
Another article talks about how the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection ordered a landowner to demolish an old sawmill dam due to flooding concerns (Devlin 2010). The owners told news reporters that they had bought this property because of its historic character. The non-profit group American Rivers paid for the dam’s demolition. American Rivers looked into modifying the dam but later decided to demolish it after the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission declared the dam had no significant historic or cultural value.

Another group of articles focus on a five hundred year old resource in Oley Township – the “Sacred Oak of Oley Valley.” The Sacred Oak is a Chinkapin Oak, which is not native to Pennsylvania, and has a height of 78 feet and a 118-foot wide spread. Besides its age, another aspect that makes this tree so special is how large it is compared to other Chinkapin Oaks. On average, the Chinkapin Oak reaches a height of 50 feet. In 2006, the farm that contained the oak went on the market and Rachel Theis, a landscape architect, bought the property (Negley 2006; Devlin 2010). One of the major selling points was the Sacred Oak. But in 2007, a group of teenagers damaged the tree with a fire they purposefully set at the base of the trunk (Young 2007). Although the tree survived, some people noticed how it started to look weak and sickly so they held a healing ceremony. In addition to vandalism, the tree has survived several droughts and lightning strikes. The new farm owners, representatives from the Lenape National Council and local Cub Scouts took part in a ceremony in which they “anesthetized the tree in preparation for a lifesaving trim of the branches” (Young 2007). Theis used her background in botany to help diagnose some of the tree’s issue and has cleared brush, cut down neighboring trees and planted wildflowers around the oak’s base. The Sacred Oak has been the site of marriages, a place to spread ashes of the deceased and a place to receive “spontaneous healings” (Devlin 2010).
In 2005, an article describes how a developer and the local zoning board worked together to shape a new development near the Oley Valley School District, just west of the town of Oley (Negley 2005). Original plans for the new development proposed a 191 acre age-restricted (55 and older) housing development but negotiations with the zoning board convinced the developer to use only 31 acres and donate the remaining 160 to the township. The township stated that they had no idea what they intended to do with the land. It seemed evident from the article that township supervisors were concerned that the original 191 acre age-restricted development would not add any new students to local schools and that it would eat up much of the land available in Oley Township for new development. As of March 2012, the 31 acre development was partially completed and exhibited single level carriage style houses. Although new developments still continue to appear in Oley, it seems that the township has a cautious and forward thinking attitude that places Oley’s future first while trying to protect historic resources.

Another group of articles illustrated different types of preservation work being done in Oley Township. One article details how the Historic Trust of Berks County stabilized the DeTurk cabin just outside of the town of Oley (Cuyler 2009). Located along the Manatawny Creek, repeated flooding events eroded mortar and destabilized the stone foundation of the small 1767 structure. The De Turk house served as a retirement home for Johan and Deborah Hoch DeTurk after they raised 12 children in a larger stone farmhouse on the farm. The Historic Trust hired a master mason and a preservation carpenter to stabilize the foundation and add inconspicuous steel beams for additional support. In all, the Trust spent $63,000 on repairs and continues to raise money to build a stone diversion wall to keep flood waters away from the building’s foundation.

In 2010, a local farmer, Mark Hoch, decided to sell his farm after being continuously farmed by his family for eight generations. The Hoch farm was the ninth longest continuously family owned farm in Pennsylvania and the longest in Berks County. In
1994, he sold the farm’s development rights to ensure that his family’s ancestral land would remain open forever. Hoch’s three children did not want to take up farming so he decided to sell farm to a Mennonite family “young and eager to farm” (Youker 2010). Hoch noted, “My family was Mennonite when they first came here… I guess I brought it back full circle.” This article provides a sense that there are others willing and waiting to get their chance to continue Oley’s agricultural tradition.

Lastly, a 2006 article talks about how a self-guided driving tour provides an opportunity for locals and Berks County visitors to learn about the history of the larger Oley Valley area, which includes Oley, Exeter, and Amity townships (Negley 2006). The driving tour includes stops at notable churches and houses where the area’s earliest events took place. One such place is the Mouns Jones House, Berks County’s oldest documented home. James Lewars, the program director and administer of the Daniel Boone homestead, noted, “The area’s diverse population was an anomaly in the 1700s and early 1880s.” The project received $9,000 from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and another $3,000 from the Daniel Boone Homestead. This article helped illustrate how residents and local groups feel strongly about their heritage and work to preserve it in a variety of ways.
Figure 12: Colebrook Landfill from southeast section of Oley Twp.

Figure 13: Cricket Slope Farm with new development in background

Figure 12 illustrates how a landfill in a neighboring township affects the views within Oley. Nearly the entire Oley township border is made of gently rolling tree covered hills, but this figure shows that the landfill has stripped a sizeable portion of the forest. Figure 13 shows a portion of the Cricket Slope Development entrance and a historic barn on the property.
Figure 14 shows the typical style of new development in Oley. Despite efforts to keep development limited to certain areas, new houses highly contrast from Oley’s culture of using local materials and its Germanic character. Figure 15 shows a sign for Lehigh Heidelberg Cement Group. Several quarries have been in existence prior to the township’s National Register nomination in 1982.
Summary

As one of the earliest and larger Pennsylvania rural historic districts, Oley Township’s National Register nomination identifies a large number of historically significant features. These include aspects relating to settlement, religion, agriculture, architecture and industry. Significant historic features in Oley include Germanic style architecture, persistent land use patterns relating to agriculture and settlement, and a community makeup much like it was over two centuries ago. What the national register identified as historically significant in 1982 can be found in Oley’s landscape today. The newspaper articles attest to Oley’s continued efforts to preserve its heritage, such as the self-guided driving tour and some old farms getting new owners. Other articles provide reminders to the fragile nature of historic landscapes, in the case of the Pleasantville covered bridge accident and vandalism to the “Sacred Oak of Oley Valley.”
Chapter 5

Part II: Preservation Strategies

Introduction

Chapter 5 examines the different initiatives Oley Township used to preserve its historic landscape features. These initiatives include National Register status as a historic district, zoning ordinances, and farmland preservation programs including easements and agricultural security areas. This chapter also looks at other factors that have contributed to the preservation of Oley’s historic character; including the community at large and a discernible historic landscape. This chapter aims to answer how the question: How did Oley Township preserve its rural heritage.

Oley Township 1984 Planning Study and Comprehensive Plan

Although National Register status alone does not provide much protection to historic resources (unless federal funding is involved), it has raised awareness that Oley is unique and is worthy of preservation. The National Register Nomination was “a source of community pride [and] deserved a celebration” (Stokes et al. 1997: 65). As a result of its National Register status, Oley residents realized more needed to be done in order to proactively protect its rural heritage. With the Rural Project’s recommendations, Oley Township moved forward to implement stricter planning and land use regulations. Stokes et al. relate, “The Township appointed twenty township residents to conduct a planning study… The committee was asked to update the comprehensive plan, articulate a clear commitment to the township’s agriculture and historic character in all township
policies, and decide how best to deal with demand for development” (Stokes et al. 1997: 65).

The updates to the comprehensive plan and a planning study required funding that the community did not have. To raise the necessary funds, the committee members formed the Oley Valley Heritage Association in 1984 and organized a heritage festival to raise money for the study. In its first year, the association raised seven thousand dollars (Stokes et al. 1997). In addition to raising money, the Heritage Association held a celebration to commemorate the Township’s status as a historic district. The Heritage Association continues to operate today (individual membership runs at ten dollars) and continues to provide educational services to “persuade township residents to provide special care for the area’s historic character” (Stokes et al. 1997: 65).

Once the necessary funding was secured, the twenty member planning study group worked over eighteen months in 1984 and 1985 to discuss and address community concerns ranging from small lot development, limestone quarry expansion, and farmland preservation (Stokes et al. 1997: 65). Key planning study recommendations included the following: agricultural zoning, new subdivision controls, regulations to protect limestone bedrock resources, and controls to restrict demolition of historic structures (Stokes et al. 1997: 66). It took an additional three years for local government officials to adopt a comprehensive plan based around the planning study group’s recommendations. A final comprehensive plan was adopted in 1987 (Stokes et al. 1997: 66).³

³ The 1987 Comprehensive Plan was difficult to track down, as well as any 1984 planning study documents. The information contained in this research came from secondary sources due to actual documents unavailability.
2009 Joint Comprehensive Plan

In 2009, Alsace, Ruscombmanor, and Oley Townships adopted a joint comprehensive plan to “assure that the future of the Oley, Alsace, and Ruscombmanor Region will be shaped by the municipalities’ own vision, rather than by reactions to forces acting upon the Townships” (Berks County Planning Commission 2009: 1). The resulting comprehensive plan was created to build upon existing county level comprehensive and greenway plans in an effort to better integrate regional planning efforts.

Within the Joint Comprehensive Plan is a section titled “Historic Resource and Preservation Plan” which covers the local history of all three townships, historic resources located within, and a list of recommended actions for further and continued preservation (Berks County Planning Commission 2009). There are 183 historic resources listed for Oley Township in this document. The comprehensive plan does not go out of its way to discuss the preservation of historic landscapes but rather seems to focus more on the built environment. Some areas seem to indicate the preservation of the historic landscapes as a whole with phrases such as “historic character” or “historic resources”. In one case, the document mentions the preservation of historic landscapes and view sheds that “protect the context of the history of the region”.

Although not innovative by any means, the Joint Comprehensive Plan suggests some key actions in preserving local heritage and historic character. The following is a partial list of specific recommendations contained in this document (Berks County Planning Commission 2009):

- Protect the character of Oley Village, Pleasantville, Pricetown, and the area’s other villages with appropriate zoning strategies.
- Support the efforts of local and county historic preservation groups to continue identifying and protecting historic resources.
- Preserve recognized historic sites and structures. Discourage inappropriate development in historic areas.
- Require impact studies for development near significant historic resources, and require mitigation of potential adverse impacts to historic resources.
- Review and update the Historic Preservation Ordinance in Oley Township, implemented by the Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB).
- Discourage demolition by neglect and deterioration of historic resources.
- Encourage responsible conservation and maintenance of historic architecture, especially the stone farmhouses located in the Region.
- Preserve historic landscapes and view sheds that protect the context of the history of the Region.
- Develop programs, events and interpretive signage and exhibits that highlight the history of the Region.
- Support the activities of individuals and groups that identify, document, evaluate, and protect historical resources and increase public awareness of the area’s history and historic resources.

Following these recommendations, the Joint Comprehensive Plan describes the Federal, State, and Local organizations and laws that focus on historic preservation related matters. Although the Joint Comprehensive Plan suggests practical recommendations and contains a fairly comprehensive list of historic resources and background information, it does not do much more than suggest what these three townships could do. Oley Township has already enacted several of the comprehensive plan recommendations. The intent of the plan seems to be to encourage the two neighboring townships to follow Oley’s model of preservation and planning. Nonetheless there is also room for improvement in Oley Township and some of the plan’s recommendations, i.e., reviewing and updating ordinances and promoting preservation education should be continuing goals for future Oley Township preservation efforts.
Zoning Ordinances

Overview of Oley Ordinances

Oley Township has ordinances in place that cover the historic district and historic buildings. The following section examines the historic district and building ordinances which directly affect the historic character of the township. In addition to these two ordinances, Oley Township has enacted several other ordinances which include land subdivision, recreational areas, sidewalks, and streets.

Historic District Ordinance

The 1982 National Register Nomination recognized the entire township as a historic district; however local zoning ordinances only applied to a small portion of the township until 2005. Before 2005, only the small village of Spangsville, in the extreme eastern part of Oley, was considered a historic district in terms of local zoning and ordinances. In May 2005, Oley Township supervisors voted to expand the historic district to cover the entire township for the purposes of Oley ordinance 320, “Township of Oley Historic Preservation Ordinance” or “Historic District Ordinance” (Negley 2005). The 2005 historic district ordinance has the following purposes:

“To promote, protect, enhance, perpetuate and preserve historic districts for the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation, protection and regulation of buildings, structures and areas of historic interest or importance within the Township of Oley; to safeguard the heritage of the Township of Oley by preserving and regulating historic districts which reflect elements of its cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history; to preserve and enhance the environmental quality of neighborhoods; to strengthen the Township’s economic base by the stimulation of the tourist industry; to establish and improve property values; to foster economic
development; to foster civic pride in the beauty and accomplishments of the Township of Oley’s past, and to preserve and protect the cultural, historical and architectural assets of the Township of Oley for which the Township of Oley has been determined to be of local, state or national, historical and/or architectural significance” (Codes of Ordinances 2004).

A historical architectural review board (HARB) was also created in 2005 to oversee any activity pertaining to historic structures (build prior to 1940) within the Township. Oley’s HARB board is comprised of seven members who are appointed by the board of supervisors including a registered architect, a licensed real estate agent, a building inspector, a planning commission member, a resident who lives within the district with knowledge concerning historic districts, and a township resident (Codes of Ordinances 2004). The HARB’s duties include providing recommendations to the township supervisors concerning the granting of any certificates of appropriateness; providing annual reports detailing HARB meetings and cases reviewed; and an annual statement about the state of preservation in Oley; and completing a minimum of eight hours of training annually (Codes of Ordinances 2004).

In addition to the above duties, the Historic District Ordinance charges the HARB board with conducting surveys of historic buildings, structures, objects and monuments to determine which ones are historically significant; when appropriate establish new historic districts or modify boundaries of existing historic districts; create and maintain a program for historic markers; advise township supervisors on issues concerning historic sites and structures; consult with state and federal preservation agencies when needed; advise property owners about rehabilitation, repairs, maintenance, adaptive reuse, and tax incentives; and provide educational programs to promote the public interest (Codes of Ordinances 2004).

The Historic District Ordinance sets forth a number of design guidelines which are used by HARB when reviewing any proposed alteration to a historic structure or site. One
particular guideline considers the impact of a proposed change upon the general historical and architectural character of the district and the appropriateness of exterior features as seen from public roadways. One section of the Historic District states that if the HARB advises and the township supervisors approve demolition of a historic structure, “a good faith effort shall be made by the Township of Oley and property owners to move said building or structure to a proximate site” (Codes of Ordinances 2004).

The process for reviewing a certificate of appropriateness is lengthy and involves several steps. According to the Historic District Ordinance, anyone wishing to make a modification to an existing building must fill out an application for a certificate of appropriateness. This application is then reviewed by a building inspector who decides whether it needs HARB review. If the HARB intervenes, the property owner is notified and asked to provide the board an explanation of proposed alterations. After the board reviews the project, it creates a report based on its recommendations. The recommendations are passed onto the board of supervisors and building inspector who then make a determination based from these recommendations. If denied, the property owner can appeal the decision at the Berks County Court of Common Pleas.

Another section within the historic district ordinance is a provision addressing demolition by neglect (Codes of Ordinances 2004). This section declares that all buildings and structures must be maintained and protected from decay and deterioration. The Joint Comprehensive Plan discussed earlier encourages all municipalities to enact similar measures to protect historic resources.

Although Oley’s HARB review process is typical in terms of other HARBS, its intent is for the township to preserve its historic properties built before 1940. However, there are loopholes that cause concern. While the HARB reviews proposed alterations to pre-1940 structures, it does not review new development in terms of its impact on local historic properties. In addition, the ordinance exempts any proposed modification to “non-
residential building[s] or structure[s] used or to be used for a working farm” (Codes of Ordinances 2004). Historic barns and outbuildings, one of Oley’s most remarkable historic assets fall into these categories and could become the focus of insensitive alterations. It suggests the township favors agricultural vitality and wants encourage productive, working farms. This creates an intriguing and complex issue for a township that wants to protect its historic resources yet its main resource is agriculture which requires modern improvements to maintain farms.

**Building Ordinance**

Oley Township requires all demolition plans to be submitted to the board of supervisors and planning commission for review. The purpose of this ordinance is “to protect, from immediate demolition, any building that has been designated as having significant historic value” (Codes of Ordinances 2004). Any building over 100 square feet built prior to 1935 and considered a contributing or exceptional historic resource must go through this review process. Violators of this ordinance face up to a $1,000 dollar fine with an additional fine of $1,000 per day the activity continues.

Similar to the Historic District Ordinance, the Oley Township Building Ordinance aims to protect historic demolition or alteration without first going through different levels of local government. As mentioned above, the Historic District Ordinance does not cover non-residential farm buildings on working farms. The Building Ordinance covers all buildings, but not those with fewer than 100 square feet. It is possible that smaller structures, such as smoke houses, spring houses, or various other outbuildings, could be demolished without any oversight. While these resources are not the large iconic barns or homes in Oley, they enrich historic district character. In addition, the $1,000 dollar violation fine appears minimal, especially in the unlikely but possible event that someone
destroys a historically significant structure that has much more value to the historic district and local community than a $1,000 dollar fine.

**Oley Zoning Ordinances**

At 186 pages, “The Oley Township Zoning Ordinance” is the longest and most detailed section of Oley’s collection of enacted ordinances. Passed in June 1992, Oley’s zoning ordinance has proved to be one of the township’s more effective tools in preserving agricultural activities and historic character. The zoning ordinance has the following purposes (Codes of Ordinances 2004):

- Minimize impediments to existing farming operations in order to make possible the continuation of farming as the Township's chief economic activity.

- Direct new nonagricultural development into designated areas in order to avoid the conversion of agricultural land to other uses.

- Protect the most sensitive and vital natural features in the Township against the potentially negative impacts of inappropriate land development.

- Minimize the consumption of land for development in inefficient patterns of use by concentrating new and expanded development uses among and adjacent to existing uses where existing community facilities can be utilized.

- Minimize the impact new development has on the Township historic resources and promote public education and private actions for historic resource protection.

- Provide opportunities for a reasonable mix of land use types consistent with the traditional land use pattern in the Township.

With these purposes in mind, the zoning ordinance divides the township into the following twelve zones (Codes of Ordinances 2004):
- RU Rural Districts
- RA Residential Districts
- RMH Residential - Mobile Home District
- V Village District
- LB Local Business Districts
- LIB Light Industrial and Business District
- HB Highway Business Districts
- I Industrial District
- AP Agricultural Preservation District
- HV Historic Village District
- RUV Rural Village District
- AQRC Age Qualified Residential Community District

As illustrated in Figure 16 on page 74, Oley’s zoning ordinances stratifies the township into various areas of development. The northern most part of the township is more developed than the southern end (historic and modern development). As a result, new development is constrained to the north central area of the township along the Freidensburg Road corridor and to Pleasantville. As a result of zoning regulations, Oley has successfully constrained new development to a narrow strip through the township instead of allowing it to spread into agriculturally rich areas to the north and south (Exceptions include a quarrying industry in the southern portion of the township that predates the historic district and local zoning laws).

**Agricultural Preservation District**

Oley’s agricultural preservation district provides an overview of the township’s efforts to preserve agricultural heritage and productivity. The intent of Oley’s agricultural preservation district is to sustain agricultural activity as the most treasured and protected
resource in the township. The agricultural preservation district is noted as “AP” in figure 16. The AP district covers the southern half of the township.

The AP district zoning regulations state: 1) that agricultural practices and products make up the largest sector of the local economy so they must be preserved by protecting the township’s most valuable and productive farmland, 2) the ordinance follows suit with the township’s current comprehensive plan which calls for the preservation of high quality farmland, and 3) (and probably the most notable passages of Oley’s zoning ordinances) that farmland will be considered “developed land” – not developable land, and that it should be protected for the community as a whole (Codes of Ordinances 2004).

As part of Oley’s agricultural preservation zoning, the township has implemented sliding scale zoning (Codes of Ordinances 2004). Sliding scale zoning limits the number of times an original parcel can be subdivided into smaller residential lots. In Oley’s AG zone, large land holders (such as farmers) can subdivide their land into additional lots in accordance to the following:

**Table 3: Oley Township Sliding Scale Zoning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Area as of January 1, 1992</th>
<th>Additional Lots Allowed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 7 acres</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 7 acres to but not including 30 acres</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 30 acres to but not including 80 acres</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 80 acres to but not including 130 acres</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 130 acres to but not including 180 acres</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 180 acres to but not including 230 acres</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 230 acres to but not including 280 acres</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Codes of Ordinances 2004

Tracts of land over 280 acres are allowed one additional unit for every fifty acres. Once one landowner decides to subdivide, all future owners are “bound by the acts of previous
owners” (Codes of Ordinances 2004). For example, once a 130 acre farm creates five new lots, the original tract of land from which these five created can no longer be modified in any way.

The sliding scale system in Table 3 shows the maximum number of lots any large landowner could decide to create and complements other limiting criteria for new lot development. The AP zoning ordinance states that proposed subdivision must be located on lands which “cannot be feasibly farmed” (Codes of Ordinances 2004). Examples of such lands include wooded areas, rock outcroppings, swamps, and slopes greater than 15%, and any land area considered too small for efficient use of farm machinery. If no unsuitable conditions exist, all new lots “shall be located on the least agriculturally productive land feasible, and so as to minimize interference with agricultural production” (Codes of Ordinances 2004).

Table 4: Privately-Owned Residential Building Permits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Permits Issued</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Permits Issued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census

Oley Township zoning ordinances specify where and how large newly created residential lots can be in the AP zone (Codes of Ordinances 2004). Within a subsection, “density,
“area and bulk regulations,” the ordinances establish minimum lot sizes. To be defined as a farm, a tract of land must contain a minimum of 75 acres. Single family residential lots, two family residential lots, and any other use (other than for agricultural purposes) must have a minimum area of 40,000 square feet but no more than 66,000 square feet (or about an acre and a half). In addition, single family and “other” use lots must have a minimum lot width of 150 feet and two family lots must have a width of 170 feet. Another aspect of this section places no limitations on the height of agricultural buildings but restricts nonagricultural buildings to 35 feet.

**Rural District**

Oley’s rural district zoning (noted as RU on the zoning map in figure 16) is much like its agricultural preservation district in terms of lot size restrictions for new development, however; Oley’s RU district places a greater emphasis on rural residential character in addition to supporting activities including agriculture, forest, recreations, conservation, and open space activities (Codes of Ordinances 2004). The RU district covers the northern part the township. In comparison to the AP district lot size maximum of 66,000 square feet, RU districts lots must have a minimum of 66,000 square feet. While there is no set limit on how large lots can be, any new development cannot occupy over 15% of the overall land area of any given lot. In effect, the ordinance sets forth regulations to preserve the existing rural character and low density development still visible in this region of the township. Additionally, it enables a mixed use environment of residential, agricultural, recreation, and small businesses which has existed in this part of the township for the past few centuries.
**Village District**

The village district (noted as V on the zoning map in figure 16) is unique because it encourages a much higher density than other districts. The village district area focuses on the village of Oley which has historically consisted of a mix of residential and commercial uses. In comparison to the rural district’s 15% maximum building to land area ratio, the village district allows up to 95% building coverage on any given lot as long as it meets certain setback requirements (Codes of Ordinances 2004). Another unique aspect of this zoning area is its regulations concerning apartments and townhomes, which require a set distance from one another, as well as minimum living area square footage.

**Highway Business District**

Perhaps one of the most noticeable changes in Oley Township since its inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places is the highway business district (noted at HB on the zoning map in figure 16) The highway business district serves as a place for “a wide-range of highway oriented and service type business establishments to encourage the sound and attractive commercial development of highway frontage” (Codes of Ordinances 2004). Given the current visual clutter of the HB district in regard to the township’s historic resources, it is fortunately confined to a small area just outside of the village of Oley on Route 73 (the Memorial Highway).

The highway business district allows any use that the village district permits with the exceptions of car washes, car dealerships, distribution centers and wholesale businesses. While there is a lot size minimum for each of these uses, there are no set maximum lot sizes. Any development proposal must be submitted to the board of supervisors for approval. Although this area looks starkly different from the historic farms and homes of Oley, it provides a place for local residents to buy essential items that they could not
otherwise get without traveling a long distances (such as the Weis Grocery Store). In an appropriate manner, the township has established this business district in a confined area along the main corridor in which most new development already occurs while keeping it separate from the historic countryside and village center.

**Industrial Districts**

The industrial district (noted as I on the zoning map in figure 16) was created “to promote unified development of industrial uses and to encourage facilities that are a harmonious and appropriate use of the overall land resources of the Township” (Codes of Ordinances 2004). In addition, local zoning regulations recognize the threat of industrial activities to the overall health and well-being of township residents in terms of natural resources including ground water. Zoning regulations allow the following uses within the industrial district: agriculture, game preserve, quarry, asphalt paving production plant, township uses, research laboratories, heliports and wholesale/warehouse activities (Codes of Ordinances 2004).

As part of the industrial district zoning regulations, any businesses located therein must meet certain performance standards. Although not as stringent as DEP standards or other federal agency, any operation must ensure that no harmful emissions are released from the site that could cause damage to animals, vegetation or “[could] cause any soiling at any point beyond the property line” (Codes of Ordinances 2004). As Oley’s biggest industrial enterprise, quarrying activities such as blasting are not permitted between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. All industrial operations must meet local, state and federal regulations and provide copies of all necessary permits to the township board of supervisors (Codes of Ordinances 2004).
The darker area in the map illustrates where denser development can occur, while areas that are lighter show areas in which agricultural oriented zoning are in place. Oley zoning ordinances have limited most widespread development to a narrow strip through the center of the township, while preserving farmland to the north and south.
Farmland Preservation

County Level

The Berks County Agricultural Preservation Board administers and oversees all county farmland preservation activities. The purpose of the Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board is to “permanently preserve large clusters of viable agricultural lands by acquiring agricultural conservation easements (ACE). An ACE prevents the development of the land for any purpose besides productive agriculture” (County of Berks 2012). In 2012, the township was ranked as third in the nation for its efforts in farmland preservation (County of Berks 2012). Overall, the township has preserved 636 farms and 64,356 acres through its farmland easement program as of May 2012 (See Figure 17) (County of Berks 2012). Just in April 2012, the board was allocated 4.4 million dollars to purchase easements on 18 farms with a land area of 1,700 acres (County of Berks 2012).

An agricultural conservation easement ensures a property will only be used for agricultural purposes for perpetuity. As Stokes et al. notes, “the [conservation] easement runs with the land” (1997: 224). For clarity purposes, an easement can be considered a “deed” or “conservation” restriction (Stokes et al. 1997: 225). Agricultural conservation easements can be purchased or donated voluntarily by the landowners. Unlike local zoning laws which are subject to change and do not address specific features of farms or other unique characteristics, agricultural easements can be tailored to cover many areas including agricultural land, historic preservation, facades and environmental resources (Stokes et al. 1997). Once a farm is placed under easement, it cannot be subdivided into lots less than 52 acres (Berks County Agricultural Preservation Board 2009).
As a precursor to agricultural conservation easements, townships can establish agricultural security areas (ASA). Once a township creates an ASA, interested individuals can voluntarily enroll and receive the following benefits: 1) protection from eminent domain or condemnation; 2) protection from local nuisance ordinances; and 3) become eligible for consideration for an agricultural conservation easement (County of Berks 2012). In order for an ASA to be established, 250 acres within a township must be enrolled. Once 500 acres are established, the farms within the ASA are eligible for agricultural easement program consideration (County of Berks 2012).

**Agricultural Preservation in Oley Township**

As of the end of 2011, seventy Oley Township farms were covered by agricultural conservation easements, the highest in Berks County (County of Berks 2012). These seventy farms account for over nine million dollars in state investments, over six million in county investments, and nearly three and a half million dollars in voluntary donations made by local farmers (County of Berks 2012). Overall, Oley’s contribution to the ACE program accounts for 11% of the overall easement land area for the entire county and 7,286 acres within the township (almost half of the 15,360 acre township) (County of Berks 2012).

**Summary**

Oley Township’s preservation efforts were initiated by the Rural Project and its outcomes which include Oley’s National Register status and a 1984 planning study. These early programs lead to local ordinances, zoning regulations, and farmland preservation programs which have effectively protected Oley’s rural heritage. In particular, Oley’s buildings are protected by an ordinance which requires review of any alteration to a pre-1940 structure. In addition, Oley zoning
regulations restrict new development in agricultural areas through sliding scale zoning. Oley’s zoning regulations effectively direct most new development to a narrow corridor through the upper section of the township. As a later program, farmland preservation strategies, including the ACE program, has protected valuable farmland for perpetuity.
Figure 17: Map of Berks County Farms under Easement in 2011

Oley Township is clearly one of the most protected Berks County townships in terms of Farmland easements. Overall, Oley’s contribution to the ACE program accounts for 11% of the overall easement land area for the entire county and 7,286 acres within the township.
Other Factors in Preserving Oley’s Historic Landscape

Community Involvement

Stokes et al. note, “[t]he [Oley] valley is home to dozens of farm families whose roots reach back to Oley’s first European settlers, who arrived in the early eighteenth century” (1997: 61). Up until 2010, Pennsylvania’s oldest continuously family owned and operated farm was located in Oley Township. The Hoch Farm, located in the northeastern corner of the township, was under the same ownership for nearly eleven generations. This is just one instance which illustrates the land tenure of Oley’s residents. In other cases, families whose ancestors settled in the valley over two centuries ago continue to live in the region. Mrs. Hopkins, the preparer for the National Register nomination, bought a historic grist mill property in Oley which was originally built by one of her ancestors. This type of relationship to the past has created a sense of belonging and guardianship over the valley’s historic resources.

Through various community organizations, activities and events, Oley residents continue to be proactive about preserving their heritage. For example, the Oley Valley Community Fair Association was created in 1946 and continues to host a community fair every year in September. The logo for the Fair depicts aspects of Oley’s history including the Pleasantville covered bridge, the DeTurk house, and “the tree in the middle of the road” (See figure 18). The community fair, which “promotes good friendly competition among the many friends and neighbors of the surrounding Oley area,” serves as an outlet for locals to showcase their homemade goods and livestock (Oley Valley Community Fair Association n.d.). For some people, fair preparation happens all year long in the hopes of winning a prize for the best fruit jam or vegetable. In a way, the community fair has become a sort of family reunion for valley residents and an outlet to show each individual’s hometown pride.
Other types of community involvement have also been rewarding in terms of their outcomes. Over the years since the 1982 National Register Nomination, some events in the valley have required grassroots community action in order to protect certain historic resources. According to Stokes et al., a grassroots movement formed when a landfill in the neighboring Earl Township was creating several issues for Oley Township. Oley Township went to battle with the State to get truck routes limited and local residents stepped up to patrol township roads to ensure the routes were enforced. The landfill issues continued to plague the township, especially when its sewage facilities considered treating landfill leachate\(^4\). Public outcry from this resulted in the election new township

\[\text{Figure 18: Oley Valley Community Fair Logo}\]

The Oley Valley Community Fair Logo depicts Oley’s most treasured historic resources. One of the more unusual historic resources shown above is a place called “the tree in the middle of the road”.

\[^4\] Landfill leachate is the product of water passing through waste which dissolves certain solids. In most cases, these solids are harmful to the environment.
supervisors in the 1989. One of the new township supervisors, who was also a member of the Oley Valley Heritage Association, successfully stopped plans for leachate treatment at the sewage treatment facility. This caused the landfill to pursue an alternative plan to release leachate into a local Oley stream, but this action was blocked by Township’s National Register status and agricultural security area. As a result, the landfill found an alternative solution outside of Oley’s boundaries (1997).

The landfill threat was not the only issue Oley confronted. In 1992, several flooding events and lack of maintenance on the Pleasantville Covered Bridge (see figure 19 below) caused PennDOT to pursue a project which would close the bridge and create a bypass through nearby farms (Stokes et al. 1997). As the last covered bridge in Berks County maintained by PennDOT, the opportunity to close the Pleasantville Bridge was attractive due to the special maintenance and costs associated with covered bridges. Although plans were made for a bypass and bridge closure, the farms which the bypass would sever were in an agricultural security area which prevented the bypass. Other farm owners in the vicinity were convinced by township supervisors to sign up for agricultural security area status. In addition, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission stepped in and raised concerns about the effect of a bypass on historic structures near the bridge (Stokes et al. 1997). At the end of the battle, PennDOT decided the only option was to restore the bridge and construct barriers to block oversized trucks (Stokes et al. 1997).
Although there are many success stories intertwined in Oley’s preservation efforts, there have been times that the township has not been so fortunate. Right around the time Oley was ready to pass agricultural zoning ordinances, five farmers in the southernmost end decided they wanted to subdivide portions of their farms. Since the ordinances were not yet in effect, the farm owners were able to slide by. Despite Oley’s efforts to block the subdivision, a 1995 court case ruled that the farm owners could operate under the older, less restrictive, ordinances (Stokes et al. 1997). Over the years, other subdivision issues have come up and have ended with more positive results. One such case was the Cricket Slope subdivision located on the boarder of Oley village. A community group formed, called the Friends of Cricket Slope, and members lobbied for a development sensitive to the site’s existing farmhouse and barn. Both the farmhouse and barn were preserved,
however a typical looking subdivision now occupies the former pastures behind the historic structures.

Some Oley residents have taken a strong interest in understanding the opinions of their neighbors. The Oley Valley Heritage Association conducts exit polls during township elections to get a better idea about how people feel about different issues, including farmland preservation. In 1991, after years of battling for agricultural zoning regulations and numerous petitions voicing concern against them, an exit poll was conducted and found that 75% to 80% of valley voters were in favor of agricultural protection measures (Stokes et al. 1997). That same year, the board of supervisors gained a preservation centered majority. Stokes et al. quotes Phoebe Hopkins who said, “People stand up for things in Oley. It’s not hard to do things right now while you’ve got the right people in office” (Stokes et al. 1997: 161). Through various community actions, and numerous experiences with close calls, the residents of Oley have been emboldened to continue their efforts in historic preservation.

**A Discernible Historic Landscape**

Perhaps one of Oley’s greatest assets which drive individuals to preserve its character is its discernible historic landscape. From almost any spot in the valley, residents and visitors can readily see and feel the historic nature of the valley’s resources. Even in the highway business district laden with modern buildings, one can see the steeples of historic churches and the back sides of old brick homes with their characteristic double decker porches. Although Pennsylvania has numerous historically unique areas, not too many come close to the density and level of preservation as Oley’s historic resources. Where else in Pennsylvania, or any area for that matter, can one drive down a road and see so many productive farm complexes in their historic contexts free of any
nonconforming clutter for miles upon miles? It is clearly evident that Oley retains its historic integrity. While credit can be given in part to Oley’s long settlement history and the accumulation of historic resources, the fact that so much has survived and remains in intact in its historic context is rare in itself.
Chapter 6

Summary and Conclusions

I was first introduced to the Oley Valley area in an independent study which focused on photographing historic landscapes for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. I traveled all over Pennsylvania in search of historic landscapes to photograph and Oley made a major impression on me – so much so that I decided to revisit it and study it for my graduate school studies. At the time of the independent study I thought of Oley Township as a very interesting place, however this study has shown there are several other factors, such as community makeup and involvement, which are not apparent in a quick drive through the township for photographs.

This study covered an overview of historic preservation, its evolution to include historic landscape preservation, current literature concerning preservation values, and a case study of Oley Township. The case study of Oley Township was by Nancy Rottle’s study of Ebey’s Landing National Reserve in Washington State. The study is divided into two sections. The first phase explored Oley’s National Register Nomination and the historic characteristics it identified. The second phase documents how Oley Township effectively preserved its historic landscape. I focused on which historic characteristics make up a historic landscape, how these characteristics achieve a sense of historic integrity, to what degree they are retained, and the programs and factors in place to preserve them.

The first phase revealed that most of Oley’s historic features are intact and continue to be proactively preserved. I met with Phoebe Hopkins, the National Register nomination preparer, and receive copies of the original photographs from the 1982 nomination
process. The views and features in the photographs appear to be almost unchanged in comparison to photographs I took only days before. In some cases earlier intrusions into the historic landscape appear to have blended into the landscape over time. A few of the 1982 photographs showed new residential development which at that time was devoid of any vegetation other than lawns and a few shrubs. Today, these same places have mature trees, personalization, and features such as vegetable gardens, small orchards and architectural details which recall historic patterns. However, not everything has improved. Several large housing developments have sprung up around the township, but only in areas where zoning laws allow. The new housing developments are typical large single family suburban homes however; they are limited to a narrow strip of land which transects the center of the township. This same area contains many of the Township’s villages and towns and has been historically residential.

The other major portion of the first phase was identifying what was important in the 1982 National Register nomination and comparing those elements to what was still found in the landscape. This required several field visits to photograph sites and views and conducting research to back up findings or explore potential areas of interest. While traveling around the Township, I observed for five different categories of historic features. These included settlement, religion, agriculture, architecture and industry. Almost every feature called out in the National Register nomination was easily identified in the field visits. Almost anywhere I looked I saw historic buildings, lime kilns, cemeteries, active farms, and valley wide views.

I enriched my field experience by contacting a local farm owner and their family who showed us their property. At this one farm, I observed elements from all five areas at one place. The farm had Oley Valley tile roofs (local industry), characteristic Germanic architecture, an active and productive farm (even after two hundred plus years), and a small family cemetery which was enclosed by a roofed stone wall (religion). The current
owners, who had just bought the farm from a former twelfth generation farm owner, knew about the farm’s history and how the farm evolved (settlement history). From this site visit, as well as my numerous and repetitive trips up and down country roads, it was apparent to me that almost all the farms in the valley shared this same discernible historic narrative. In other words, it was apparent that Oley Township had retained its historic integrity since 1982.

The second phase explored different means that valley residents used to preserve the historic landscape. These included the community’s participation in the Rural Project, National Register status, local ordinances, zoning ordinances, farmland preservation programs, and a collective community spirit which appreciated and protected its heritage. Since the early 1990s Oley has proactively passed a variety of Township ordinances which focus on its historic resources. One of these specifically protects any building alteration to any resource built before 1940 through a process led by a local HARB. Local zoning ordinances were established around the same time and seem to follow historic patterns for the most part. At the county level, farmland preservation is achieved through the purchase of farmland easements. In 2011, Berks County was ranked second in the nation for farmland preservation efforts. On top of these measures, the local community, who for the most part are descendants of Oley’s earliest settlers, readily support local initiatives such as zoning policies, ordinances, and heritage activities (which include a local fair and heritage organization). Local volunteers conduct exit pools during elections to gain insight into what the community at large feels about different issues which have ranged from zoning ordinances to the establishment of the historic district.

Having completed this study, I have found several areas which could be investigated in the future. First and foremost, it would be beneficial to inventory and reevaluate current historic resources in the Township as the National Register nomination and Rural Project
did in the early 1980s. Although not much has changed in the past thirty years, the small changes that have occurred can snowball and quickly lead to larger issues later. Since time restraints did not allow for this element in this study, it would be beneficial to conduct a landscape study of the entire township which would focus on mapping current landscape features including hedgerows, circulation patterns, boundaries, and general landscape characteristics. This could become something that resembles a photographic study of the landscape. Not only would this help identify preservation issues within landscape features, it would provide a benchmark to base future studies on and provide a method to evaluate how local polices are effecting preservation efforts. And finally, I was surprised to find out that many of the original documents from previous studies and preservation efforts in the valley were not readily available. It would be helpful if the entire community, especially local students, could access these documents and maybe be inspired to contribute or participate in Oley’s preservation efforts.

There are many places in Pennsylvania which have historic resources but rarely does any community have such strong community cohesion as Oley. Ms. Hopkins noted in the 1982 nomination that, “One can speculate that Oley is what it is today because of the quality of heritage – the value system handed down through the generations, starting with the first settlers. The work ethic, the conservation ethic, the desire for independence and self-sufficiency – all are deep-rooted here. Through most of its existence, it has been a place of “Oley Families” holding to their heritage. For this reason there is unity and integrity to be found in its culture” (Hopkins 1982). Perhaps Oley’s greatest resource is not its historic resources but instead the residents the Township
References


County of Berks. *Agricultural Land Preservation.* May 2012.
http://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/AgLandPres/Pages/default.aspx (accessed May 16, 2012).


—. "Log by Log, They Save a Part of Local History." *Reading Eagle*, April 7, 2007.


Appendix A

Oley Township Rural Historic District National Register Nomination Form
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Oley Township Historic District

and/or common

2. Location

street & number N/A

city, town Oley Township

county

state Pennsylvania code

3. Classification

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<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Prevent Use</th>
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<tr>
<td>object</td>
<td>Public Acquisition Accessible</td>
<td>X, yes: restricted</td>
<td>military</td>
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4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership

5. Location of Legal Description

court, house, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds, Berks County Court House

street & number 6th and Court Streets

city, town Reading, state PA 19601

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

The Historic American Building Survey has this property been determined eligible? X yes 

date 1999 X federal state county local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington, D.C.

state
7. Description

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<th>Condition</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>X. excellent</td>
<td>X. deteriorated</td>
<td>X. original site</td>
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<tr>
<td>X. good</td>
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<td>moved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. fair</td>
<td>unaltered</td>
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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

General

Oley Township is located in Berks County in southeastern Pennsylvania, approximately ten miles east of the city of Reading. It comprises most of the Oley Valley, a fertile and scenic pocket of farmland "almost entirely surrounded by hills, as it were, with the rest of the world shut out." The township covers an area of 15,045 acres of some of the best agricultural land in the county. Roughly 80% of the land is open farmland, 10% is in scattered woodlots, and 10% is developed. The topography is gently rolling, ranging in elevation from 300 to 500 feet within the valley and rising to 800 feet in the northeast corner. The township boundaries correspond fairly closely with the edges of the Limestone Valley along the Licking Creek to the north (view 1), Manataway Creek to the east (view 2), and Oley Lake Road to the south (view 3); and the hills above Monocacy Creek to the west (view 4). The farms and villages of this well-defined area, set apart ecologically, topographically, and in cultural heritage, make up a historic district of remarkable integrity.

Throughout the township and defining its character are the buildings and landscape features of the mid-18th to late-19th centuries (views 5). Overall there are some 180 farmstead groupings, each with one or more buildings dating within the period 1740 to 1880. Every farmstead consists of a house and barn, and from one to ten outbuildings (view 6). Most common are stone cabins (views 7 & 8), springhouses (view 9), summer kitchens, bake-ovens, and smoke-houses (views 10, 11, and 12). Farm buildings such as small barns, sheds, and workshops exist in great variety (views 13 and 14). There are more than 500 such structures, all displaying insights into the building materials, construction techniques, architectural forms and types of lifestyle found in this locale in different periods. Surrounding many farmstead groupings are yards, barnyards, gardens, orchards, and groves of locust trees (views 14 & 15) which in turn are surrounded by meadows, pastures, and fields (views 1 & 16). These traditional farm land settings recall a 19th century sense of space. With the exception of two modern highways (Rte. 73 and 622), township roads follow their 19th century cartways (view 17), level with the terrain, making right-angle turns around fields, connecting the farms with the mills, churches, schools, and villages, and on two occasions passing through covered bridges (view 18).

Near the center of the Township is the Village of Oley, the residential and commercial hub of the area. Its main street has witnessed a 100-year period of development and includes several farmhouses c1800, a succession of dwelling houses, shops, and public buildings, mostly of brick, built 1830 to 1930, and only a few later 20th century houses (views 19, 20, 22, 22). The collection of buildings here, a product of 150 residential and commercial buildings, displays a rich variety of forms, styles, building materials, and architectural details. As with the farmsteads, space and landscape define the setting. In front, the road or street (formerly tree-lined) surrounding each house, its fence, yard, garden, sheds, and barn are typical small lots and plantings (view 24); and in the back along the alley, the sheds, barns, and carriage houses, mostly of frame construction (view 25). Despite modern innovations of paving, curbing, and some exterior building renovation, the architectural integrity of this residential grouping clearly imparts a nineteenth century sense of time and place.
Title: Historical Sites of Berks County
1976 Map by George Kaiser, IA
Historical Society of Berks County
Reading, PA

Title: Architectural and Historic Resources Study of Oley Township
1980
Berks County Conservancy
Wyomissing, PA

Item 7. Description

Also contributing to the 19th century design of the community is the presence of five other small settlement areas near the edges of the township several miles distant from Oley Village. Each of these served as the location of a store or tavern in the early 1800s, later to be designated as a Post-Office site in the mid-1800s. These include the 18th century iron-making settlements of Oley Forge (view 26) and Oley Furnace (view 27) centered around an iron-master’s mansion, store/tavern, gristmill, and worker’s homes; and the 19th century cross-roads villages of Pleasantville (view 28), Yellow House (view 29), and Limekiln (view 30), each of which boasts a former store/tavern, lodge hall, church or school, and several dwellings.

Periods of Development:

In looking at Oley Township as a whole, one can see elements of historic and architectural development covering a time-span of over 200 years. Based on the recently completed inventory and mapping of buildings, certain periods of significance can be identified.

1712-1740 was the settlement period when tracts were surveyed, fields were cleared, and shelters were most often constructed of logs. Because many of these log buildings were replaced by more permanent stone structures (sometimes on the same foundations), there are not a great number that remain. Possibly ten to twenty cabins, springhouses, and small barns or outbuildings survive from this period, although dates are difficult to determine. Most of these are stone buildings. Other reminders of the settlement period are certain property boundaries, family cemeteries (view 31), and roads (view 32).
1740-1750 stands out as possibly the most significant period architecturally because the concentration, integrity, and diversity of Oley's "Germanic Style" buildings of this era is thought to be unsurpassed in any other township in the country. This native Pennsylvania German colonial architecture exists in a variety of building types. Large steep-roofed stone houses, early stone barns with arched openings, and more modest outbuildings are examples that can be found throughout the Oley Valley, on more than fifty farms located.

1780-1820 is the other extremely significant period, representing the era of development of the fine Georgian manor, the great Pennsylvania stone barn, a thriving water-powered industry of mills, forges, and furnaces, and a network of roads with several inns and taverns. Another sixty farms have buildings dating from this time.

1820-1860 was a significant period of growth with a population increase of 269. It marked the establishment of Oley Village which, in 1860, included 40 dwelling houses, two churches, two school houses, an academy, a tavern, two shops, and various small industries. In the rest of the township over 100 houses were built, primarily plain-faced homes of stone or brick representing the vernacular style architecture that is the most common form to be found here.

1860-1900 witnessed little overall population growth but was a major period of village expansion. Brick Victorian period homes are popular both in village and rural sites. At least sixty Oley Village homes and eighty rural dwellings have been dated from this time.

Development did not cease after 1900, but a period of very little growth lasted until 1950. At this time some of the land that had always been forested was sold for other purposes - quarrying and housing. This has resulted in a fairly large number of "non-contributing" structures that have recently been added to the landscape. Fortunately they have been assimilated in such a way that the historic character overwhelmingly predominates.

Intrusions

At present the quarries occupy nearly 4% of the township area, and they have given a new contour to the topography (views 33, 34, 35, 36). Operated by two companies at four different sites and they represent an intrusion in the southern section of rolling farmland.

New houses are found in two kinds of situations. Nearly two thirds are "concentrated" near Oley Village (view 37) in suburban-type neighborhoods distinct from the Main Street historic area, or grouped along Rt. 73 (view 38), a new highway with its own adjacent (housing, sewer, and some commerce) cutting across farmland, providing a place to build. Here the fact that they are so grouped makes it easy to consider them lumped together in a small space, relatively insignificant when looking at the big picture. The other one-third of newer houses are widely scattered along township roads, (view 39, 40, 41) "diluted" in impact, where their residents enjoy being out in the country.
Quarries and housing together occupy less than 10% of the township area. They serve as a counterpoint to the dominant historical theme that is found here, a reminder that it is the setting that holds it all together, the 1200-plus acres that were farmed in the 18th and 19th centuries. The integrity of the district, it seems, is less dependent upon the integrity of its exceptional buildings (though this is impressive) as it is upon the integrity of the farmland which provides visual continuity linking all the farmsteads, villages, waterways, and woodlots, producing a total environmental of living history.

**District Boundaries**

The township boundaries have been chosen as the district boundaries for the following reasons:

1) Definition. The township boundaries are clearly defined and are historic political boundaries. Although the original Oley territory included the townships of Exeter, Rockland, District, Earl, and Piko, the present boundary has existed since 1812. The southern border is marked by historic roads, dividing Oley from Exeter and Amity Townships. The other lines can be related to geographical changes that can be seen on the contour map. The Greater Oley Valley does include part of Piko (Katz settlements, Lahahsville and Piko mill villages), part of Exeter (Limekills and home settlements) and part of Amity (Fallow Hill). These areas could become future "add-on" historic districts.

2) Visual Integrity. Upon entering Oley Township from almost any direction, one senses an emergence into an open area of well kept farmlands and scattered villages. Visually, historically, and agriculturally this area is a distinct entity, different from its surroundings.

3) Community Support. Because Oley Township is participating in the Rural Project of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, local government officials and citizens have helped with the township's historic sites inventory and support this nomination.

**Building Inventory**

An inventory of all township buildings and/or groups of buildings has been prepared by local volunteers. Each farmstead was counted as one site, regardless of the number of buildings or dwelling units on the premises. Each residential or commercial building was listed individually with the exception of the five modern residential tracts near Oley Village, Oley Gardens, Oley Estates, Rockford Hills, Clay Cliffs Road, and Mont Road. Those are uniform suburban-style developments in confined areas, where each tract was classified
Included as accompanying documentation are:

Maps:

1. Set of four quadrangles of U.S.G.S. maps, 7.5 minute series to show the township boundaries. This set was used to produce the township base map of the same scale, but on one sheet. The corners of this base map were used as UTM reference points.

2. A land use/land cover map of the township identifying township roads, land use features, and public buildings.

3. A rural historic resources map showing locations of historic farmsteads, gristmills, blacksmith shops, linekilns, covered bridges, and cemeteries. Photo views are also marked on this map.

4. A historic resources map showing significance classifications.

5. A map showing dates of buildings.

Photographs:

A set of 70 black and white photographs, (5" x 7"s and 8" x 10"s), are included to illustrate the written description and significance sections. These are numbered in reference to the text and identified by HELP system number to be keyed to the inventory and the maps.
## Significance

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### Specific dates

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

**Overview**

Oley Township is one of many Pennsylvania Dutch farming communities located throughout the limestone valleys of southeastern and central Pennsylvania. However, because it is set apart topographically it has developed a unique identity. Ninety percent of its land area remains in its original use since settlement. Its concentration of 18th century stone farm buildings may be the greatest to be found in any one place. It has more designated historic sites including family homesteads and burial grounds, covered bridges, and gristmills than any other part of Berks County. It has six historic villages. Its historic properties are distributed throughout the township, connected, for the most part, by a series of roads and fences that go back 100 to 200 years. Overall, it is an outstanding example of a Pennsylvania Dutch farm community where the existing architectural and cultural heritage illustrates 250 years of rural development.

**In Berks County, Oley Township is recognized as an important settlement area and a farming community of the first order. Within Pennsylvania it is considered significant for its associations with the early iron industry and certain early religious movements, as well as for its rural architecture of the 18th and early 19th centuries. In the mid-Atlantic region, Oley has been chosen by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as a community worthy of an intensive effort in rural conservation. Through nomination to the National Register Oley Township seeks confirmation of its value as an entity, a historic district in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.**

**Settlement**

The settlement of Oley Township between 1712 and 1740 was locally significant because it established the enduring character of the area. The mingling of people of different cultural backgrounds—French, German, Swiss and English—produced a community with a unique identity. Families were founded here that have remained for generations after generation. Patterns were established in fields and boundaries that persist to this day. The earliest of the remaining stone cabins, barns, springhouses, smoke houses and bake ovens were built marking the beginnings of a rich architectural heritage. Crafts were started, each farm having its specialty. By the time the township was officially chartered in 1740 it was a well-established working community of over forty farms.

One can speculate that Oley is what it is today because of the quality of heritage—the value system handed down through the generations, starting with the first settlers. The work ethic, the conservation ethic, the desire for independence and self-sufficiency—all are deep-rooted here. Through most of its existence, it has been a place of "Oley families" holding to their heritage. For this reason there is unity and integrity to be found in its culture.
Religion

Because most of Oley's settlers were religious refugees - Quakers from England, Huguenots from France, and members of various reformationist movements from Switzerland and Germany - Oley became a center of several 18th century religious movements. This can be noted through some of today's historic sites.

The DeBonneville House (view 42) has been recognized as the first formally established place of Universalist worship in America. Built by the Huguenot teacher, preacher and physician, Dr. George DeBonneville, in 1745, this large stone house originally contained a second floor meeting room which served as church and school. Now used as a two-family dwelling, this site is visited on Universalist pilgrimages.

The DeFurck House (view 43) is associated with the Third Heretic Synod of 1742. Here Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf attempted to unite all Protestant sects in an early ecumenical movement, only to drive them more deeply into separate denominations. An event of note was the baptism of three Indians from Dutchess County, N.Y., in John DeFurck's barn, (one of whom is said to have been the "Last of the Mohicans," later made famous by James Fenimore Cooper).

The "Oley Churches" at Spangenburg (view 44) mark the site of Oley's first log meeting house erected in 1735 on land donated by John Lesher. A "Union Church" serving two congregations existed here until 1821-22 when its Lutheran and Reformed congregations built separate buildings. One of Oley's largest and oldest cemeteries can be found at this site.

Agriculture

It was the limestone soil of the Oley Valley that attracted settlers from the Palatinate region of Germany, farmers who characterized their plots as the most fertile land throughout Eastern Pennsylvania. For this reason the development of agriculture in Oley is similar to that in other Pennsylvania German regions. It was based upon the Palatinate farmers' conception of what a farm should be - well-ordered and self-sustaining. To achieve this goal, farm families would work for generations.

As in other aspects of cultural heritage, Oley Township retains the physical reminders of its agricultural development. Linekils (view 45) built along roads and tucked away in fields give evidence that from an early date farmers in this area knew the value of sweetening the soil. The many farm buildings present a fascinating subject, worthy of further research. The study of evolution of barn forms in Oley, for instance, might be as comprehensive as any such studies done in the whole state. A partial total of 37 18th century and 116 19th century barns was listed in our inventory, each with its own design variations. Dating from the earliest barn on the Kauffman Homestead (c. 1730), there may be examples from each succeeding decade of the 18th and 19th centuries (view 46, 47, 48). Although stone barns are more common, frame, brick, and log barns can also be found. Other farm buildings present similar opportunities for research. The overall scope and scale of the townships 160 historic farm complexes testify to the productiveness of this land and the wealth of this resource.
The importance of various crops can be gauged from the facilities used to handle them. Barns were built with huge hay mows and large quarys showing that hay and grain were raised in great quantities as feed for cattle and horses that were stabled below. Corn cribs are common, as are root cellars, for the storage of fruits and vegetables. Wheat has been called the "money crop." Seven gristmills still stand in Oley, and five others just over the township line in Pike, Exeter, and Amity Townships. The amount of wheat required to keep these mills running must have been tremendous. Comparing the scale of farming as it must have been out with the tools and equipment that were available, one can see why, historically, farm families have been large families.

The well ordered self-sufficient family fare reached its culmination in the late 19th century as illustrated by artist Ferdinand J. Havre in his pencil sketches of 1882. A comparison of the Croz Homestead as he drew it (view 49) with the same view today (view 4) shows the kinds of changes that have occurred during the past 100 years. Now, in its 11th generation of family ownership, it possesses fewer labor-intensive adjuncts such as gardens, orchards, and numerous fenced enclosures, and more mechanized components like silos and milking facilities. The old buildings are intact, however, indicative not only of adaptive use but of family pride.

Industry

Evidence of 18th and 19th century water-powered industry is part of Oley Township's historic fabric. The Manayunk and its tributaries, and even the small Monocacy Creek were tapped at every available spot. It seems, where the construction of a race or dam could provide enough head to turn water-wheels and turbines. Remnants of these races can be seen near the seven existing gristmills and other mill sites, such as the sawmills, oil mills, fulling mills, paper mills, and red ochre mills depicted on 1820 and 1862 maps. Rare examples of continually operating early 19th century mills are the beautiful Georgian-style Knaab-Bieber gristmill, built 1809 (view 50) and the rustic Yoder sawmill, c. 1800 (view 51).

The villages represent iron-works communities. Spangler, along the Manayunk, was the workers' village for Oley Forge. The actual site of the forge is marked by the John Tinker House (view 55) built several years after he helped establish this business in 1744. His home, next to a cliff which overlooked the forge buildings and a 40 acre dam, contained a large vaulted wine cellar, and entrances at four levels. Between 1746 and 1870 the forge was operated by the Spang family. The Georgian style Spang Mansion (view 53) was their home since 1809. Other buildings in the village were the store and post office, worker's homes (view 26), and nearby churches and gristmill (view 54).

The village of Oley Furnace along Furnace Creek in the northeast corner of the township dates from the 1760's and contains the Daniel Oley mansion and gristmill (view 27), a former tavern, store, office, superintendents' house, ramblers' house, and workers' houses, all within a half-mile of the charcoal furnace site. Iron ore was mined in the near-by hills and Oley owned vast tracts of woodland to provide charcoal.
Architecture

The wealth of Oley's architectural heritage is its most significant attribute, remarkable for its numbers, diversity, and quality. From the settlement period to the end of the 19th century, the range of architecture includes certain buildings "unique" to this area, others proclaimed the "best examples" of their type, many with a "distinctive Oley interpretation of style," and altogether an assemblage of vernacular architecture that presents a panorama of rural community development with very few gaps.

This architectural heritage as an expression of culture derives from Pennsylvania German values to build for permanence and to keep what can be used. Buildings were well-built. They were built to serve a function. When this function was no longer needed, they were made to serve some other function. Whether added-to, adapted, maintained or restored, they have lasted. Well over 700 buildings of the 18th and 19th centuries make up this historic resource.

Among Oley's most celebrated buildings, noteworthy for their integrity, adaptation to site, and expressive use of materials are the earliest steep-roofed stone cabins and farm buildings of medieval Germanic character, "buildings which illustrate the early chapters in America... the expression of a people who still cherish their memories of their homeland."

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One feature associated with some of these buildings, the clay tile roof, is more abundant in Oley than any other place. There are thirty-eight tile-roofed buildings in the township, six on the Conrad Reiff farm alone (view 59 and 60). Known as Oley Valley tiles, they were fashioned of native clay, designed with grooves to channel water to the central overhanging section. Because of their weight, heavy roof timbering and bracing was required.

Many mid-18th century farmhouses have been labeled "transitional style," denoting the transition from the center-chimney, plain-fronted German to the balanced formal Georgian style. End chimneys and a balanced five-bay facade might be combined with a steep roof or gable eaves as in the Cleaver Homestead (view 61), Peter Griesemer House (view 62), or the John Hunter House (view 63).

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By the end of the 18th century the Georgian style achieved its finest expression in the works of Gottlieb Brexel, builder of the Henry Fisher House, his masterpiece (view 64), and a number of other intricately detailed structures. Outstanding features of his work are the cornice moldings and doorway detail.
(Nicholas Hunter House, view 65) These decorations were often repeated in interior woodwork.17

The bulk of early 19th century township homes can be classified as "Pennsylvania German vernacular farmhouses." Primarily 2½ story, plain-faceted rectangular stone buildings, they commonly have 2 to 5 bays with end chimneys, gable roofs, and 6 over 6 sash windows with panelled shutters. Often they incorporate a rear wing which in many cases was an earlier house or summer kitchen. They may have porches along the front or at the ell. The same form was later adapted to brick and frame construction (view 13, 36, 66, 67, 68). As a group they exhibit the sturdy, orderly and functional character that defines the Pennsylvania Dutch farmstead.

The development of a commercial center between 1830 to 1900, with the shops and homes of tradespeople together with the homes of retired farmers, produced its own distinctive architecture expressing the thoughts and innovations of the times. Existing village architecture reflects a wide range of styles, materials, spatial relationships, and building types. This can be seen in representative streetscapes (view 19, 20, 21, 22, 23). The description given by Dr. Peter G. Berlolet in 1860 still rings true: "Some of the houses are fine buildings and the general appearance is clean and neat."18

Most of the types of buildings that have been built in Oley Township during the past two hundred years have survived in their appropriate settings. Enough of the total environment remains that it is possible to see and feel what rural areas of the period were like when passing from one type of place to another. One can visualize the activities that took place in the villages, along the streams at mills and forges, and on the farms. This affords an opportunity to explore the past open to anyone who visits Oley.

At a deeper level an opportunity to learn about the past through more technical and substantive research exists for anyone with the interest, skill, and time to devote to the subject. Oley represents a "gold mine" for scholarly research on architectural, cultural, social, and agricultural history. More than buildings remain to tell their stories. Family records, photographs, art-works, antiques, hand-crafts, and memories exist here spanning the generations. And still more is buried beneath the surface in archeological records. Taken all together Oley Township is a historical resource of infinite dimensions.
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property: 5.065

Quadrangle name

Quadrangle scale

UTM References

A
Zone: 18
Easting: 430,000
Northing: 4,463,000

B
Zone: 18
Easting: 430,000
Northing: 4,463,000

C
Zone: 18
Easting: 430,000
Northing: 4,463,000

D
Zone: 18
Easting: 430,000
Northing: 4,463,000

E
Zone: 18
Easting: 430,000
Northing: 4,463,000

F
Zone: 18
Easting: 430,000
Northing: 4,463,000

G
Zone: 18
Easting: 430,000
Northing: 4,463,000

H
Zone: 18
Easting: 430,000
Northing: 4,463,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

date code county code

date code county code

11. Form Prepared By

Name: Phoebe L. Hopkins, Project Assistant
Organization: Oley Township Resource Cons. Project
Date: August 20, 1982
Street & Number: R.D. #1
Telephone: 215-987-5559
City or Town: Oley
State: PA 19547

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 89-655), I hereby certify 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

date

Chief of Registration

date
FOOTNOTES


5. Troll, op. cit., p. 41-45.

   Ibid.


13. Ibid. p. 106.


Fagan, L. (Surveyor), Township Map of Berks County, Pennsylvania Philadelphia: Bridgman, 1862. Excellent Survey. Tends to be more accurate than the 1876 survey.) U.S.


Hoppin, Phoebe Bertolet, "The DeYonk House of Oley" Historical Review of Berks County, Reading: Historical Society of Berks County Spring 1960.


Long, Rogers, Jr. The Pennsylvania German Farm Family Farm, Breinigsville, Pa.: The Pennsylvania German Society, 1972.
Melzer, George M., IX. "Graveyards of Historic Oley" Historical Review of Berks County, Reading: Historical Society of Berks County, Summer, 1968.

Melzer, George M., IX, Historical Sites (Road Map) of Reading and Berks County, Reading: Berks County Historical Society, 1976 (900 sites pinpointed).


Montgomery, Morton L., History of Berks County in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia: Everts, Peck and Richards, 1886 (Considered to be the best account of the County's history. Very detailed. Illustrated. A recent reprint was published by the Berks Co. Historical Society.) P.L., N.S., B.C.C.


Saleo United Church of Christ, Two Hundred Fortyfifth Anniversary Historical Booklet, Oley, 1976.


Womens Club of Oley, A Day in the Oley Valley, Forbes and Farmhouses Along the Mainatay, Oley, 1969.
BEGINNING at a point in Boyertown Pike, State Traffic Route 562, said point being 2700 feet East of the intersection of Route 562 with Route 662 in the Village of Yellow House; thence in and along Route 562 along the Township of Amity in a Northwesterly direction 8010 feet to a point; thence still along the Township of Amity in a southerly direction 920 feet to a point in Limekiln Road; thence in Limekiln Road along the Township of Amity and the Township of Exeter in a Northwesterly direction the various courses and distances: 19,920 feet to a point said point being approximately 2600 feet Northwest of the intersection of Limekiln Road and Kelat School Road, said point being a corner in common of Exeter and Alsace Townships; thence leaving said road in a Northerly direction along the Township of Alsace 7030 feet to a point; then continuing along the Township of Alsace in a Northwesterly direction 4020 feet to a point a corner of Ruscombmanor Township; thence along the Township of Ruscombmanor the two following courses and distances: (1) in a Northwesterly direction crossing State Traffic Route 73 and crossing State Traffic Route 662, 7085 feet to a point; (2) in a Northerly direction 5600 feet to a point, a corner in common of Ruscombmanor and Rockland Townships; said point being a distance of 1000 feet East of the intersection of Hill Road and Furnace Road; thence along the Township of Rockland in a Southeasterly direction 10,500 feet to a monument on the East side of Forgedale Road, a corner in common of Rockland Township and Pike Township; thence continuing along the Township of Pike the three following courses and distances: (1) in a southeasterly direction 620 feet to a point approximately 400 feet East of Bertol Mill Road; (2) in a Southerly direction 2020 feet to a point; (3) in a Southeasternly direction 3480 feet to a point; thence in a southerly direction along the Township of Pike and the Township of Earl crossing Route 73, 27,300 feet to a point, the place of BEGINNING.
Appendix B

Oley Township Rural Historic District National Register Photos

Source of Photographs in this Section:
Phoebe Hopkins, Oley Township Resource Conservation Project, 1982

Figure A: View of Hoch Family Cemetery
Figure B: Characteristic view of countryside roadway and farm fields

Figure C: View of an Oley Farm
Figure D: View of Kauffman Farm Complex
Figure E: View of Hoch Farm

Figure F: View of an Oley Farm
Figure G: View of an Oley farm near a limestone quarry
Figure H: Example of new development in 1982

Figure I: View of new housing development in 1982
Figure J: View of Salem Church from Kauffman Farm Complex
Figure K: Salem UCC and Cemetery

Figure L: View of an Oley Farm
Appendix C

Oley Township Rural Historic District In Local Newspapers

I studied newspapers for headlines concerning the historic district, and found that headlines and content broke into three categories: 1) threats to historic resources, 2) preservation activities, and 3) miscellaneous local articles pertaining to historic resources. The following headlines and accompanying summaries provide examples for each category. I focused the newspaper study on articles dating from Oley’s inclusion in the National Register, but many of the articles found date to the last decade. The prevalence of recent articles can be attributed to the databases used to find them. Earlier articles more than likely have been archived.

**Threats to Historic Resources**

- Philadelphia Inquirer, March 27 1988: “In the Oley Valley, a battle is brewing on a landfill expansion”
  
  This article explains the local outcry for plans of a landfill expansion within the viewshed of Oley Township.

- The Morning Call, December 27, 2002: “A delicate task: Excavation of 158 Berks graves reveal old burial customs”
  
  Salem United Church of Christ moved 158 burials to make room for a church expansion. The new addition connects to a 180-year-old church.

- Reading Eagle, October 23, 2004: “Neighbors try to shape Oley subdivision: Residents work to preserve the township’s historic character”
  
  Oley residents join ranks to help plan a 13-lot subdivision on Main Street, Oley. Residents fear that a new development would starkly contrast with the numerous stone homes along Oley Township’s largest town.

  A 100-foot tall tree came falling onto a barn in which a farmer was milking his cows during a thunderstorm.

- Tribune Business News, May 23, 2006: “Truck hits Oley covered bridge: A historic span in Pleasantville sustains only minor damage but will be closed for several days while about $5,000 in repairs are made, officials say”

  A moving van hit the Pleasantville covered bridge causing $5,000 dollars in damage. The height restriction was 11’3”, but the moving van was 12’.

- Tribune Business News, June 24, 2007: “Ceremony intended as healing for oak: Participants include the owner of the 487-year-old tree on an Oley Township farm, the Lenape Nation Council and some local Cub Scouts. The tree had damage inflicted earlier this year”

  This article details the pain that many local people experienced when one of the oldest trees of the valley was damaged by a fire set by teenagers who frequently partied beneath the tree.

- Reading Eagle, April 2, 2010: “DEP orders Oley dam removed: Co-owner, farther-in-law call demolition a loss of history; state, rivers group concerned about flooding”

  Article details how a dam associated with a historic sawmill along Stitzer Road was demolished due to occasional flooding.

- Tribune Business News, January 20, 2006: “Oley church’s sign is dark after complaints: The electronic display, which violates ordinances, poses a risk for passing motorists, township supervisor David R. Kessler says”

  A local Mennonite church installed a sign that caused some accidents and violated Oley township’s ordinances concerning signage sizes.
Preservation Activities

  A nearly 300-year-old property, with portions built in 1726 by Pierre and Jean Bertolet went under major renovation by Kaiser Construction Group.

- Tribune Business News, May 9, 2005: “Oley supervisors may OK expansion of historic district”
  This article raises some confusion about when and how much of the township was actually included in the 1982 nomination. The article notes that the district expansion would require all property owners with pre-1940 structures to obtain building permits and a certificate of appropriateness for any construction or alteration projects.

- Tribune Business News, April 7, 2007: “Log by log, they save a part of local history: After a business man steps forward to rescue an old Earl Township house from demolition, workers carefully dismantle the structure and move it to Oley Township”
  Article details the process of moving a log structure 2 ½ miles from its original location to Oley.

- Reading Eagle, August 1, 2009: “DeTurk House to be structurally stronger: Preservation trust undertakes $63,000 repair project at Oley Township landmark”
  The Johan DeTurk house, built in 1767, was stabilized from years of water damage in its foundation.

- Reading Eagle, January 13, 2012: “Oley Hills properties preserved”
  582 acres were preserved with the aid of 2.1 million dollars from public and private donors. The total acreage accounts for eight properties, three
of which were the first in Pennsylvania to receive funding from the 2004 Highlands Conservation Act.

**Miscellaneous**

  
  This article describes a driving tour that highlights the greater Oley Valley region. One of the main stops is Daniel Boone’s homestead in a township neighboring Oley.

- Tribune Business News, September 7, 2006: “For sale: 94 acres, one spectacular oak: An Oley Township property has an asking price of $975,000. But the tree that comes with it has incalculable value, many say”
  
  A farm with the “sacred oak of Oley Valley” goes on the market. This Chinkapin Oak usually grows to 50 feet, but this oak is 78 feet tall with a 118-foot wide spread.

- Reading Eagle, January 12, 2010: “Farm founded in 1728 has 21st century future: Unable to keep his historic homestead in the family, an Oley Township farmer sells to a couple who will keep the legacy alive”
  
  This article describes how Mark Hoch sold his farm after eight generations of Hochs farmed the same ground for nearly 300 years.

- Tribune Business News, July 26, 2010: “Oley Township barn part of web simulcast: Program to highlight buildings in the US, Canada, Switzerland”
  
  A Swiss style barn, built in 1787, in Oley was featured in an internet simulcast. At the time of this article, the barn housed 223 heifers.