

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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Historic Agricultural Resources of Pennsylvania, c1700-1960  
Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

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### Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The identification and evaluation process for this Multiple Property Documentation Form, unlike many, proceeded from research to fieldwork rather than the reverse. It was based on the premise that in order to understand the historic rural landscape, it is first necessary to analyze the agrarian culture that gave rise to it. However, while conceptual tools abound with which to establish a modern agrarian history of Pennsylvania, no such history currently existed when the work was begun on this document. The method employed in the Historic Rural Pennsylvania Project has therefore had to include basic primary-source research into Pennsylvania's agricultural history.

The history of agriculture and rural life in the United States has been analyzed in a rich and distinguished body of scholarship. The foundations of scholarship on the history of Northern agriculture were laid by Percy Wells Bidwell and John Falconer in their *History of Agriculture in the Northern States, 1620-1860* (1925). In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a generation of scholars (led by such figures as Paul Wallace Gates, Wayne Rasmussen, and Allan Bogue) focused on such issues as federal land policy, the impact of urbanization and industrialization on agriculture, and the rise of specialized agricultural regions such as the corn-hog belt. While these scholars never completely neglected the social history of rural life, their works were chiefly grounded (both with respect to method and substance) in economic history. By the 1970s, their scholarly descendants were undertaking sophisticated quantitative econometric studies. Meanwhile, a revolution in slavery and emancipation studies contributed much to the history of rural life, especially of course in the South. Also at the same time, the "new social history," influenced by the European Annales school of historians, turned away from "great men" and national politics, to analyze demographic patterns and the lives of ordinary people -- especially women, the working class, and ethnic minorities. In the 1980s and thereafter, scholars advocating a "new rural history" sought to incorporate a broader social and cultural dimension to agricultural history. With the "new rural history" our understanding acquired added depth with studies of such subjects as gender patterns, migration, class, environmental changes, and ethnic relationships. In order to recover the lives of ordinary people, these studies made innovative use of unconventional source materials, notably vernacular landscapes and material culture. They also used conventional materials (such as the census) in new ways.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Percy Wells Bidwell and John Falconer, *History of Agriculture in the Northern States, 1620-1860* (New York, 1925, reprinted by Peter Smith in 1941.) Paul Wallace Gates's most notable contributions include *The Illinois central railroad and its colonization work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934); *The Farmer's Age*,

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Unaccountably, despite the flowering of scholarship on rural America more generally, Pennsylvania has been neglected by historians of agriculture and rural life. While historians have lavished attention on the rural South, Midwest, and West, the mid-Atlantic and Pennsylvania with it have remained in the scholarly shadows, particularly for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The dramatic industrialization and labor conflict in Pennsylvania in this period have attracted many historians, but since the publication of Stevenson Fletcher's two-volume *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life* (1949 and 1955), there has been almost no work on the history of agrarian Pennsylvania. Fletcher's book is based on primary sources (mainly published material from agricultural journals, almanacs, agricultural society reports, etc.), but it is episodic in format and it did not have the benefit of interpretive perspectives introduced after 1950. A few specialized monographs fill out the complement of significant published historical scholarship on Pennsylvania rural life. Therefore the Historic Rural

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*Agriculture 1815-1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960); and many other monographs. Rasmussen is best known for his articles about farm mechanization, especially "The Impact of Technological Change on American Agriculture, 1862-1962," *Journal of Economic History* 22 (December 1962): 578-591. Allan Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming in the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) was an influential study. For examples of quantitative studies, see Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman, *To Their Own Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987). Useful overviews of the "New rural history" can be found in: Robert Swierenga, "The New Rural History: Setting the Parameters," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1 (Fall 1981): 211-223, and Christopher Clark, "Economics and Culture: Opening Up the Rural History of the Early American Northeast," *American Quarterly* 43 (June 1991): 279-301. A narrative overview which incorporates the "new rural history" is David Danbom, *Born in the Country, A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Excellent examples of more focused substantive work in the "new rural history" include: John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism, Western Massachusetts 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West, Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: the Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Studies which use buildings and landscapes as primary evidence include: Thomas Hubka, *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: the Connected Farm Buildings of New England* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1984); Bernard L. Herman, *Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware, 1700-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Steven Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

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Pennsylvania Project has had to conduct wide-ranging primary-source research in order to bring an updated approach to evaluating historic rural landscapes and buildings.<sup>2</sup>

The research for this MPDF was conducted between Fall 2003 and Summer 2005. This first phase of the project covered PENNDOT Districts 2, 3, and 4, a twenty-four county area in the northeast and north central part of the state. Creating the agricultural context for the area involved several steps.

Census Tabulations: Using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, work-study students created databases with information from the Manuscript Census of Agriculture, 1850, 1880, and 1927, collected down to the township level. The information collected included data on crop production, land use, livestock production, mechanization, farm tenancy, and many other categories. This was necessary because the published summaries only list data at the county level, and regional boundaries often cut through counties. The township provided a more fine-grained unit of analysis. The three dates captured change over time. Various production data were graphed within these spreadsheets. This allowed for a clearer, visual understanding of patterns. This was done for all twenty-four counties.

Secondary Sources: A substantial review of existing secondary literature on Pennsylvania's social, cultural, economic, political, and agricultural history was conducted. While, as has been noted, no general history of agriculture existed, there is a corpus of more specialized articles involving agricultural subjects.

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<sup>2</sup> Stevenson Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life*. 2 volumes. (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1949 and 1955). Kuan-I Chen's 1954 Ph. D dissertation, "Agricultural Production in Pennsylvania, 1840 to 1950," provides a convenient overview based on published census data. Work that prominently features Pennsylvania includes: Joan Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Beauveau Borie IV, *Farming and Folk Society: Threshing among the Pennsylvania Germans*, (Ph. D dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1974); Diane Lindstrom, *Economic Development in the Philadelphia Region 1815-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); James Lemon, *The Best Poor man's Country, a Geographic Study of early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972); Joseph Glass, *The Pennsylvania Culture Region, a View from the Barn* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986). Note that the latter two monographs are actually by geographers rather than historians. Robert Ensminger, *The Pennsylvania Barn, Its Origin, Evolution, and Distribution in North America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) is an able analysis of form, origins, and construction; its author also was trained as a geographer.

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Primary sources: The secondary sources that specifically addressed agriculture, as we have noted above, were incomplete, so many primary sources pertaining to the twenty-four county area were studied for information about agriculture and rural life. These included (but were not limited to):

- Published materials such as gazetteers, atlases, maps, 19<sup>th</sup>-century local histories, agricultural periodicals, travel narratives, folklore compilations, farm handbooks (including books about building design), emigrants' advice books, Agricultural Extension Service and Agricultural Experiment Station bulletins, works by rural sociologists and agricultural economists.
- Unpublished materials. The most important of these were materials generated by Penn State's agriculture college, especially the records of the Agricultural Extension agents (for each county, beginning in 1915); surveys and reports done by faculty and students in departments such as Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology; student theses; and photographs. Materials in the Pennsylvania State Archives and in local archives, to some extent, were also surveyed. Records of Pennsylvania's Departments of Commerce, Forests and Waters, Tourism, and Revenue, for example, have valuable materials pertaining to agriculture, including maps and photographs. Local historical societies, particularly in Lycoming, Columbia, Centre, Snyder, Bradford, Tioga, and Mifflin Counties, have fine collections of photographs which depict rural scenes. Genealogical societies and other organizations have made vast amounts of primary material available via the World Wide Web. Probably the richest site for the history of agricultural and rural life is the Tri-Counties Gen Web site, covering Tioga and Bradford Counties PA and Chemung County New York. The Farm Security Administration photos are also online through the Library of Congress's American Memory site, as are many maps, views, etc.

The primary and secondary source materials and the tabulation of census material were then analyzed for patterns. Six Historic Agricultural Regions were identified based on this research.<sup>3</sup> Six narratives describing agrarian culture in these regions were drafted between Fall 2003-Spring 2004. Then, townships were chosen for field survey work. The townships were chosen based

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<sup>3</sup> See the Introduction to the MPDF for explanation of how the regions were identified.

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mainly on the extent to which their historic characteristics (including soils, topography, historic agricultural production, social makeup) typified the profile for the region in which they were located. Secondary considerations included such factors as accessibility; the extent of development since 1950, (which could compromise the survival of the historic resources we wanted to survey); the presence of local officials or individuals who had an interest in the project. In each region, several townships were chosen. A survey form was developed which would record information on farm ownership, acreage, buildings, and landscape features. A PSU faculty member from the Department of Landscape Architecture, Cecilia Rusnak, and two graduate students (one from History and one from Landscape Architecture) assisted in field survey. In the Summer and Fall of 2004, over 150 properties were surveyed in five of the six historic agricultural regions. Later, additional work was done in the Central Limestone Valleys, to supplement earlier work done for the Brush/Penns Valley area in Centre County. The method for choosing farmsteads for survey documentation varied with the region. In most cases, farmsteads were surveyed which lay along selected historic road routes in each township. Aerial photographs were studied before field work was undertaken, in order to determine if enough resources would be available to survey. In Potter County, known locations of migrant labor camps were visited. In Bradford County, known sites of farms that were illustrated in an 1878 county history were visited, in addition to properties located along road-routes. For the River Valleys tobacco region, survey areas were limited to river valley areas where tobacco was confirmed to have been cultivated (Cowanesque, Jersey Shore, and so on). Several return trips were made to add more surveys and to follow up on earlier work. The survey included filling out forms for properties, and recording buildings and landscape features through digital photography and through sketch site plans that included buildings and landscape features.

Meanwhile, feedback had been received from staff at the Bureau for Historic Preservation, PENNDOT's Bureau of Design, and a representative from a CRM firm. Fieldwork also suggested modifications. Two rounds of revisions to the narratives were made in Fall of 2004 and Spring of 2005 and again in Summer 2006 following further research in agricultural periodicals.

Sample Nomination: the MPDF must have a sample nomination. In Spring of 2005, several properties were visited with a view to preparing a National Register nomination that would illustrate how the context works in practice. A list of Century Farms was consulted and a number of property owners contacted; four properties were visited, and from these one was

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chosen. Penn State graduate research assistants spent much of Spring 2005 conducting research and fieldwork to support the nomination of the Jesse and Jean Houseknecht Farm in Lycoming County, representing the North and West Branch region. In Summer 2005 and Summer 2006 another sample nomination was developed, the Durst Smith Farm in Centre County, representing the Central Limestone Valleys region.

Property Types, Registration Requirements, Integrity: After the second round of revisions to the narratives, attention was turned to Property Types and Registration Requirements. The issue of Property Types was straightforward. The question of Registration Requirements was more complex, since it involved the crux of the whole project – how to apply the findings of research and fieldwork to determination of National Register eligibility with respect to Criterion A, B, C and D. Again, Registration Requirements were drawn up on a region-by-region basis. These aimed to establish requirements based on the degree to which a property reflected the typical agricultural mix of its region, as described in the narratives. The Statement of Integrity addressed issues specific to agricultural properties. All of these were informed by extensive primary research and field observation.