

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Robesonia Furnace Historic District

other name/site number: Reading Furnace; Robesonia Iron Co. Ltd.

**2. Location**

street & number: Furnace/S. Church (N/A) not for publication

Freeman Sts.; Mountain/E. Meadow Aves.

city, town: Robesonia (N/A) vicinity

state: PA code: PA county: Berks code: 011 zip code: 19551

**3. Classification**

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: district

Number of Resources within Property:

<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>	
<u>35</u>	<u>9</u>	buildings
<u>2</u>	<u>—</u>	sites
<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	structures
<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	objects
<u>37</u>	<u>9</u>	TOTAL

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the  
National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: Iron and Steel  
Resources in Pennsylvania 1716-1945



7. DescriptionArchitectural Classification11 Georgian01 vernacular

other: \_\_\_\_\_

Materialsfoundation 40 stoneroof 45 slatewalls 40 stoneother N/ADescribe present and historic appearance:X see continuation sheet8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

\_ Nationally X Statewide \_ LocallyApplicable National Register Criteria: A,C,DCriteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/AAreas of Significance: 030 architecture070 community planning and development160 industry023 archaeology-historic-non aboriginalPeriod(s) of Significance: 1800-1927

Significant Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Alterations: N/ASignificant Person(s): N/ACultural Affiliation: N/AArchitect/Builder: unknown

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

X See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

X See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other - Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property: 70 acres

UTM References: Womelsdorf

	<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>		<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>
A	18	403020	4466500	C	18	403160	4465780
B	18	403630	4466380	D	18	402610	4466370

see continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

X see continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

X see continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Diane B. Reed, Historic Preservation Specialist

organization PHMC/BHP date March 6, 1991

street & number P.O. Box 1026 telephone (717)787-8045

city or town Harrisburg state PA zip 17108

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The Robesonia Furnace Historic District is located in the southern section of Robesonia borough, along the banks of Furnace Creek. It is located in the broad valley formed by the Creek, with gently sloping hills to the east and west. Contributing resources are primarily the residential component of the iron plantation. They include both high style and sophisticated vernacular buildings, most dating to the early nineteenth century. In addition, no other ironmaking community in Pennsylvania contains such a variety of workers' housing, dating from 1800 to c. 1913-15. They encompass single worker's houses, including one and a half story single stone homes (c. 1825), bungalows (c. 1913-15), and duplexes constructed of stone (c. 1845), frame (c. 1890), and slag block (c. 1910). Also included are the archaeological remains of the industrial component, which was demolished in 1927. The district retains integrity, and is little affected by the few noncontributing residences added in the mid and late twentieth century.

The industrial component of Robesonia Furnace was located in the southeast quadrant of the district. The managers house, ironmaster's mansion, office, and the better company housing are located in the western part of the district. The later company housing is located in the northeastern part of the district.

Robesonia Furnace Historic District consists of a number of buildings and structures including (see corresponding number on map for location):

1. worker's house c. 1910  
448 S. Church St. - **contributing building**

Constructed of block fabricated from slag produced by the furnace, covered with stucco on the sides, and stone on the front facade.

2. residence c. 1956  
460 S. Church St. - **non contributing building**

This is a split level, aluminum sided, with a two car attached garage.

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3. George Taylor Mansion c. 1880  
476 S. Church St. - 3 contributing buildings

This home is Second Empire with a mansard roof. The building is frame with decorative cornice brackets, and a veranda on the east and south sides of the building. The main house has two chimneys, and a two story addition, also with mansard roof and bracketing.

Behind the Taylor Mansion is the creamery building, now used as a pottery workshop. It is of frame construction, one and a half stories high. Also on the property is a small shed with cupola and unusual cornice detailing.

4. worker's or manager's house c. 1845  
492 S. Church St. - contributing building

This is a four bay two and hone half story stone house with a peaked dormer and ornamental cornice. There is a front porch running the length of the front of the house. In the rear of the house there is a frame addition of unknown age, although an addition does appear on an 1876 map of the area.

5. furnace boarding house c. 1800  
101 Mountain Rd. W. - 2 contributing buildings

This two story building is constructed of log and stone, which has been covered by more recent siding. It is three bays wide with a two bay addition which is one and a half stories high. To the rear (west side) of the building is a summerhouse of stone construction with an overhanging gable.

6. residence c. 1976  
500 S. Church St. - non contributing building

This home is a one story ranch with aluminum siding and attached garage.

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7. worker's house - double c. 1845  
530/532 S. Church St. - **contributing building**

This is a double worker's house of stone construction with quoins, four bays wide, two and a half stories high, with a peaked front gable and ornamental cornice, which were probably added c. 1880. The window sash are six over six. There is a divided front porch which spans just the front doors of each side.

8. worker's house - double c. 1845  
536/538 S. Church St. - **contributing building**

This double worker's house is stone, four bays wide, two and a half stories high with two dormers. There are stone quoins on the corners of the building. There is a porch spanning the two front doors. The sash are six over six, and the house appears to have its original shutters. The cornice has simple bracketing which appears to be original.

9. worker's house - double c. 1845  
544/546 S. Church St. - **contributing building**

This double house is stone, four bays wide, two and a half stories high with central peaked dormer, probably added c. 1880. The window sash are six over six. Unlike its neighbors, this house has no ornamental cornices.

10. barn c. 1820  
594 S. Church St. - **contributing building**

This barn is associated with the miller's house which is located to the south. The barn has stone ends and frame sides with vertical board siding. Originally the barn had a gable on the south side, and a decorative cupola. Although these are shown in a c. 1975 photograph, they have since been removed.

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11. millers house c. 1820  
594 S. Church St. - **contributing building**

The miller's house is a four bay stone house with decorative quoins. The house is two and a half stories high with a small front porch and a decorative cornice. The cornice, may have been added at a later date, as were the windows in the end gables. The windows were replaced at some point with two over two lights. There is an attached frame summer kitchen in the rear of the building.

12. workers house - single c. 1825  
107 Furnace St. - **contributing building**

This one and a half story banked stone house has been painted, but the decorative corner quoins are still evident. The building is three bays wide and two bays deep. There is a one story addition on the southwest side of the building, as well as a front porch, which were both added in the early 1960's. The window sash are six over six, and the building has double chimneys.

13. workers house - single c. 1825  
99 Furnace St. - **contributing building**

This home is similar to #12. However, the stone has not been painted and it retains a nineteenth century front porch.

14. workers house - double c. 1890-1900  
89/87 Furnace St. - **contributing building**

This frame house is two and a half stories high with a rear el and double chimneys. There is a small front porch sheltering the front doors. The building is presently aluminum sided.

15. workers house - single c. 1820  
79 Furnace St. - **contributing building**

This is a small stone one and a half story home which was presumably a worker's house. It is three bays wide and one bay deep. The windows have been replaced, and two dormers have been added in the front of the house. A front porch and rear shed addition were added at some later date.



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16. residence c. 1982  
67 Furnace St. - **non contributing building**

This is a one story ranch house with vinyl siding.

17. fire house c. 1910  
between 67 and 65 Furnace St. - **contributing building**

The firehouse was constructed of block manufactured from furnace slag. It is four bays wide with arched double doors with keystones, and two bays deep. Decorative quoins and arched openings detail the building.

18. residence c. 1986  
65 Furnace St. - **non contributing building**

This is a one story ranch house with vinyl siding.

19. residence c. 1987  
55 Furnace St. - **non contributing building**

This is a two story brick and frame residence with attached two car garage.

20. residence c. 1982  
36 E. Mountain Ave. - **non contributing building**

This is a brick cape cod, three bays wide with three dormers and attached garage.

21. residence c. 1973  
48 E. Mountain Ave. - **non contributing building**

This is a one story ranch house with vinyl siding.

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22. worker's house - double c. 1820  
60 E. Mountain Ave. - **contributing building**

This two and a half story stone house is four bays wide and two bays deep with decorative quoins. It has double chimneys and six over six window sash. This house is considerably larger than most of the worker's houses and may have been a manager's house or an additional boarding house for the furnace complex. A carport has been added to the south side of the building, and the front porch appears to be a later addition or replacement.

23. worker's house - double c. 1820  
74/76 E. Mountain Ave. - **contributing building**

This two and a half story stone house is four bays wide and two bays deep. The house has double chimneys, decorative quoins, and six over six windows. A porch on the front of the house appears to be of more recent vintage.

24. worker's house - double c. 1845  
90 E. Mountain Ave. - **contributing building**

A two and a half story frame house four bays wide and two bays deep. This house is frame, with shingles added at a later date, as well as a front porch.

25. worker's house - single c. 1820  
120 E. Mountain Ave. - **contributing building**

A one and a half story banked stone house with decorative quoins, this house is three bays wide and two bays deep. There is a one story addition on the southwest side of the house of undetermined age. The porch surrounding the front door appears to be nineteenth century.

26. spring house foundation 19th. century  
cor. E. Mountain Ave. & S. Freeman St. - **contributing site**

The foundation of the spring house and associated waterway are one of the few structures associated with the industrial component of the Robesonia district.

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27. site of the Robesonia Iron Works  
cor. E. Mountain Ave. & S. Freeman St. - **contributing site**

Very little remains of the industrial site, with the exception of several stone retaining walls and miscellaneous foundations. There are also a number of pigs, buckets, and other miscellaneous objects scattered on the site.

28. worker's or supervisor's house c. 1840  
301 S. Freeman St. - **contributing building**

This is a two and a half story stone house three bays wide and two bays deep, with decorative quoins. The cornice has decorative brackets and the windows are six over six. There is a small shed addition at the rear of the house of undetermined age.

- 29-31. worker's houses - double c. 1920  
44-46, 50-52, and 54-56 E. Meadow Ave. - **3 contributing buildings**

This group of similar houses are of frame construction with porches running the full length of each front. They are four bays wide and three bays deep with gable ends facing the street. These were the last company houses built by the furnace company.

32. residence c. 1959  
348 S. Freeman St. - **non contributing building**

This is a single mobile home with attached porch.

- 33-34. bungalows c. 1913-1915  
356 and 362 S. Freeman St. - **2 contributing buildings**

These "L" shaped one story bungalows are deceptively old. Although they appear to be of more modern vintage, they are clearly pictured in a 1918 brochure for the company. Each has a porch, which appear to have been somewhat altered. Although originally wood sided, both have been sided with aluminum.

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- 35-36. worker's houses - double c. 1885-1910  
368-370 and 376-378 S. Freeman St. - 2 contributing  
buildings

These two adjacent "L" shaped plans result in a T shaped double house. Both houses are identical, frame, four bays wide. The pitch of the main roof on the southeast side slopes northeast and southwest with a central gable facing southeast. Each has three chimneys.

37. worker's house c. 1845  
384 S. Freeman St. - contributing building

This house is one and a half stories, four bays wide, with two entrance doors with porches. The windows are six over six, and there are chimneys at each end. The house is of log construction, covered by felt paper siding. There are chimneys at each end. A garage of recent vintage is located on the northeast end of the building.

38. worker's house - single c. 1830  
394 S. Freeman St. - contributing building

This is a two and a half story three bay stone house with decorative quoins. The windows are six over six, and the shutters appear to be 19th. century.

39. worker's house - double c. 1910  
404/406 S. Freeman St. - contributing building

This house is four bays wide, and two bays deep. It is two and a half stories, and is constructed of block fabricated from slag. The windows are two over two, and there is a chimney at each end of the gable. The original front porch with brackets runs the full length of the building.

40. residence c. 1960  
422 S. Freeman St. - non contributing building

This is a single mobile home.

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41. ironmaster's mansion (Ege Mansion) c. 1807  
27 W. Freeman St. - contributing building

This is a five bay Georgian stone house with classical detailing. The six over six windows are capped with lintels with keystones. There are three broken arch pediment dormers on each side of the main roof, and double chimneys. A Palladian window on the northeast facade (rear elevation) lights an interior circular staircase. A wing was added to the southeast end of the building in the 1870's, and a portico was added to the northwest end, date unknown.

42. barn 19th. century  
27 W. Freeman St. - contributing building

The barn consists of a bank barn with stone ends and vertical boarded southeast facade, and a one and a half story stone carriage barn attached on the southwest facade. The carriage barn has large double doors in an arched opening on its southwest facade.

43. furnace office c. 1870  
26 W. Freeman St. - contributing building

This two story Italianate stone building is three bays wide and three bays deep, with a hip roof topped by an Italianate lantern. The windows and door are pedimented, and the building has an elaborate bracketed cornice. The interior is essentially intact, and contains a walk-in vault.

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Robesonia Furnace Historic District is nominated under Criterion A for industry as a good example of the early establishment of the iron industry in eastern Pennsylvania. The first furnace on the site of Robesonia was established in 1794, and the iron industry persisted there into the twentieth century. An iron plantation, Robesonia is also significant in the area of community planning and development as representative of an ironmaking community which endured and evolved over a long period of time. Robesonia is also nominated under Criterion C for its architecture. No other ironmaking community in Pennsylvania incorporates the variety, integrity, and sophistication of the architectural resources of Robesonia. Robesonia contains several buildings of architectural note, including the Second Empire Taylor Mansion, the Italianate furnace office, and the Georgian ironmaster's mansion. Although many of the other buildings are vernacular, they are distinguished in incorporating unusually sophisticated millwork and detailing. Robesonia is also significant under Criterion D for archaeology. Although the industrial component was demolished in 1927, foundations and retaining walls are still clearly visible, and have the potential for yielding information about the site by suggesting the size and configuration of lost buildings, as well as the overall layout of the complex. A significant number of artifacts, such as pigs and ladles are scattered at the site, and they may be a source of information about equipment used, and metallurgical advances made at Robesonia, and products of the company.

Robesonia Furnace began with the establishment of Reading Furnace at the same location in 1794 by George Ege, who also owned nearby Charming Forge. Ore for the furnace came from the Cornwall Mines twenty five miles distant in Lebanon County. In 1807 he built a Georgian mansion for himself near the furnace, as well as several log and stone tenant houses. After Ege's death in 1829 the property was run by a trustee, who subsequently offered the property for sale in 1836. At that time the property included 6-7000 acres of land, an ore right to the Cornwall Mines, as well as the mansion, a gristmill and a saw mill, and numerous other buildings.

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After an assortment of proprietors, in 1845 the furnace was sold to Henry P. Robeson, who came from Manada Gap Furnace in Dauphin County. Robeson replaced the charcoal furnace with an anthracite furnace with a hot blast, capable of producing 50 tons of iron a week. In 1854, Robeson, Brooke, and Company built a new stack which yielded 240 tons of iron a week. In 1855, the Lebanon Valley Railroad was completed through what was to become Robesonia in 1859, greatly facilitating shipment of both raw materials and finished products.

In 1876 George Taylor became superintendent of the furnace. Taylor was interested in further increasing production. In 1884 they abandoned one stack and enlarged a second stack to increase its capacity to 1,000 tons of iron a week. At that time the firm decided to manufacture only one kind of pig iron, named "Robesonia", made exclusively of Cornwall ore.

In 1885 the furnace was sold to White and Co. of Philadelphia for \$850,000., and became a stock company - The Robesonia Iron Co., Limited. W. C. Freeman of Lebanon became president of the company. However, George Taylor remained as superintendent until his death in 1903. Immediately a new and greatly improved furnace was erected, which remained in service until 1914.

In 1912 the company, having accumulated a mountain of slag, used it to make cinder block. They built a number of buildings in the complex utilizing the block, including a fire house, several tenant houses, and a chemical laboratory. The houses and the fire house are still standing. Further improvements were made to the furnace in 1921 when automatic fill was instituted, and in 1924 when an automatic pig casting machine was erected, as well as a large electric gantry crane.

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The increased productivity and efficiency of the furnace eventually led to its demise. When the furnace was established, it acquired a right to free ore from the Cornwall Ore Banks, 15 miles southwest, for a period of 130 years. Initially, this involved approximately 2,000 tons a year. With modern production, 100,000 tons a year were being taken from the mine for Robesonia. Although the original agreement only entitled them to ore for one furnace, by maintaining two furnaces, one always at the ready when the other was out of blast, the company ate up tremendous amounts of ore. Legal battles with the Cornwall proprietors resulted in the court establishing their right to supply one furnace, but would not allow them to utilize the other furnace when the primary furnace was not in service.

When Bethlehem Steel acquired the mines, they decided that to stem the drain on the mines their only choice was to acquire and dismantle Robesonia Furnace, which they proceeded to do on April 18, 1927. Subsequently the furnace complex was dismantled and the homes and other buildings were sold off individually.

Today, the furnace town is primarily a residential neighborhood of Robesonia borough. The Ege mansion is now owned by a rehabilitation center.



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Bining, Arthur Cecil. Pennsylvania Iron Manufacture in the Eighteenth Century. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1987.

Breininger, Lester P. Jr. "The Robesonia Furnace." Die Shilgrut fun der Tulpehock. Vol. III, number 1, November 1972. Womelsdorf: Tupelhocken Settlement Historical Society.

One Hundred and Twenty-five Years of Pig Iron Manufacture at Robesonia Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: The Robesonia Iron Company, 1918.

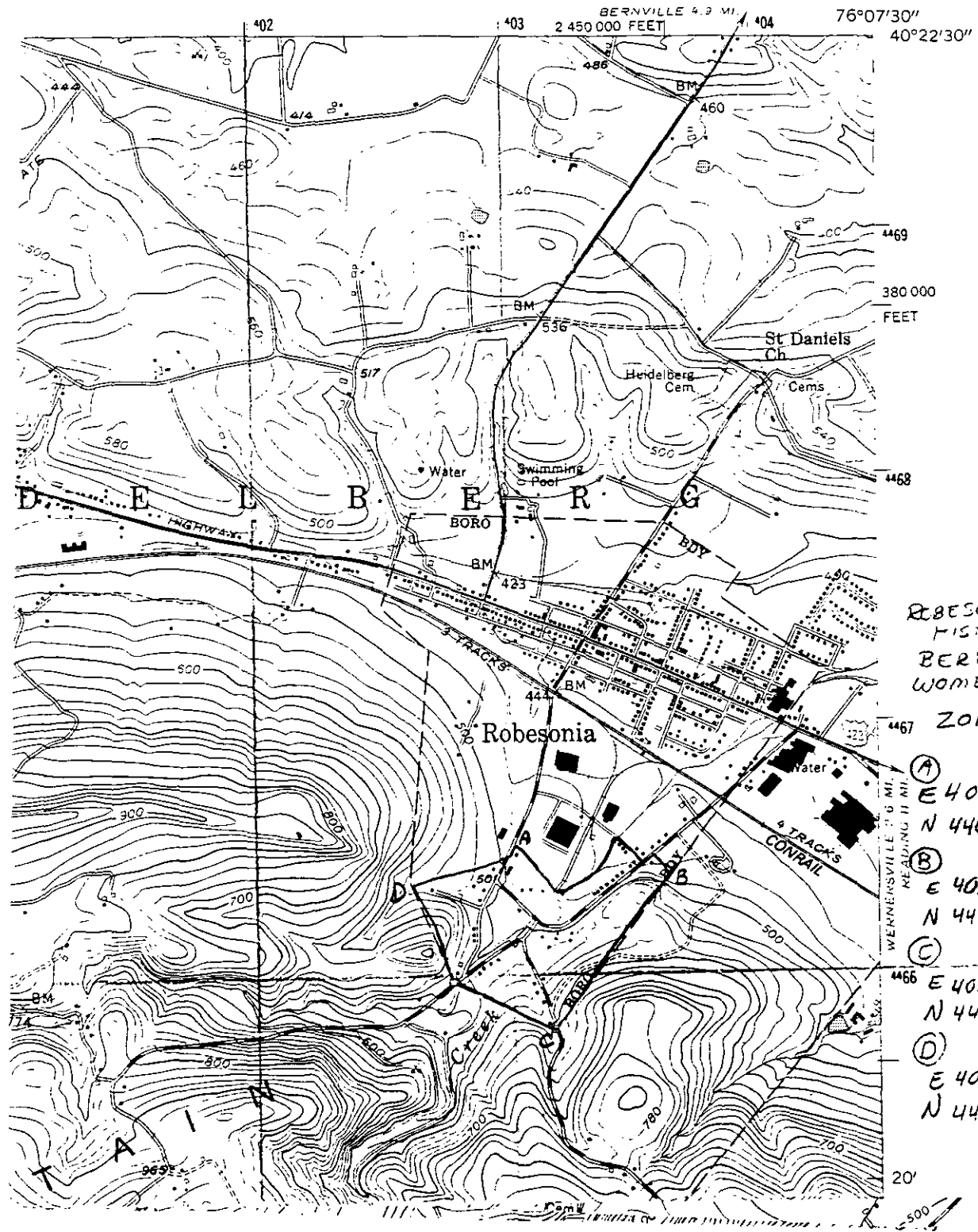
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Verbal boundary description: The boundaries for Robesonia Furnace Historic District encompass the southern section of Robesonia Borough. Beginning at the borough boundary 200' northwest in a straight line from the end of Mountain Rd. West, thence running northeast approximately 1200' to a point on S. Church St., 500' north of its intersection with W. Freeman St. Thence north along the east side of S. Church St. 200' to a point. Thence southeast parallel to W. Freeman St. to the point where the railroad crosses Furnace Creek. Thence along Furnace Creek approximately 1100' to the point where it crosses E. Meadow Ave., thence southeast along the south edge of E. Meadow Ave. to its intersection with S. Freeman St. thence north along the east edge of S. Freeman St. 170' to a point, thence southeast at a right angle to S. Freeman St. to the borough line, thence southwest along the borough line to its intersection with E. Mountain Ave., thence northwest along the borough line to its intersection with Furnace St., thence northwest along the borough line to the point of beginning. This district is as shown on the accompanying USGS and historic district maps.

Boundary justification: The boundaries of Robesonia Furnace Historic District include all extant properties which were related to the furnace. Although the site of the iron works is archaeological, it is well documented and defined, and is included in the district. A large part of the perimeter utilizes the boundary of the borough, and the other boundaries were set to include only those properties which were associated with the furnace. The area outside the district is primarily residential in character, though they do not appear to be related to the furnace. To the north are several small manufacturing concerns.

# WOMELSDORF QUADRANGLE PENNSYLVANIA 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5764 1 NE  
(BERNVILLE)



ROBESONIA FORMER  
HISTORIC DISTRICT  
BERKS COUNTY  
WOMELSDORF

ZONE 18

- (A) E 403020  
N 4466500
- (B) E 403630  
N 4466380
- (C) E 403160  
N 4465780
- (D) E 402610  
N 4466370

BERNVILLE 4.9 MI.  
WERNERSVILLE 7.6 MI.  
READING 11 MI.

20'

500'