PENNSYLVANIA HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY FORM PHOTO/SITE PLAN SHEET

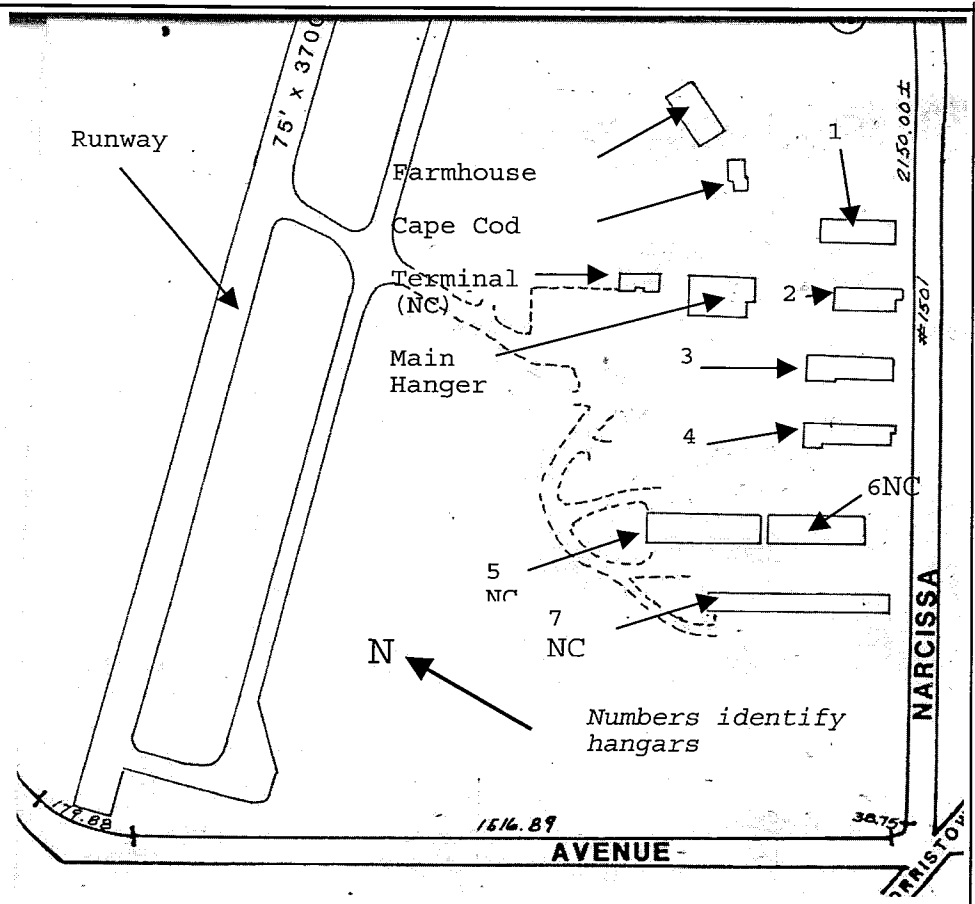
Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission
Bureau of Historic Preservation
Box 1026, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1026

Survey Code/Tax Parcel/Other No.: 66-00-04573-00-5 Block Unit #019-019 County: Montgomery

Municipality: Whitpain Township Address: 1501 Narcissa Road

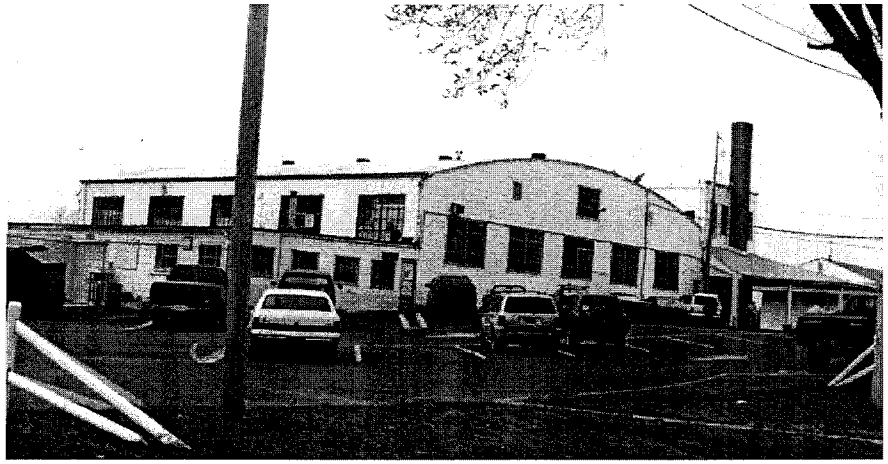
Historic Name/Other Name: Wings Field

SITE PLAN



(see additional photograph list at Physical Description page)

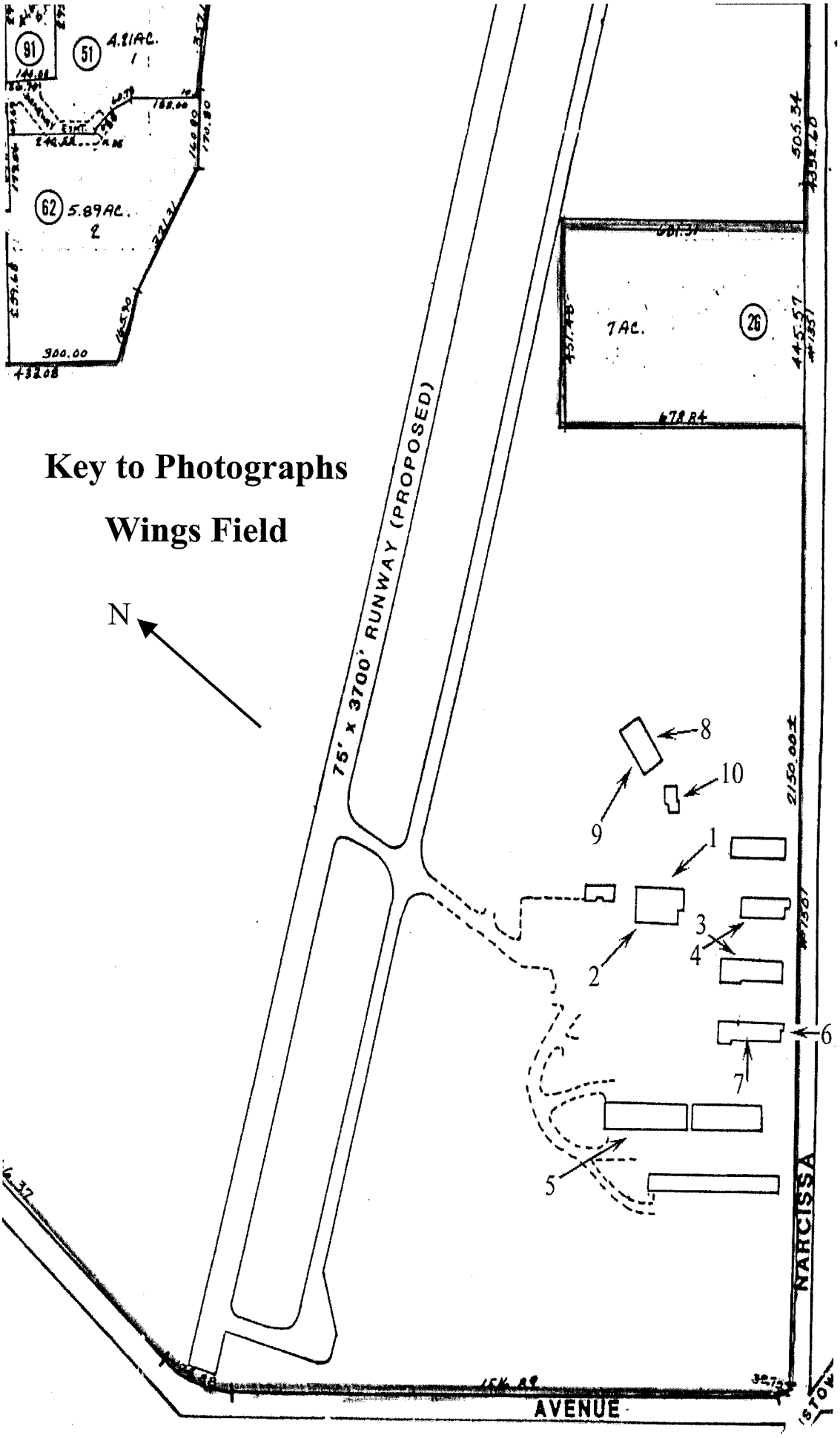
PHOTO INFORMATION



Number	Description of View	Direction of Camera
1	Main Hanger, south & east facades plus addls.	N
2	Hanger #1, north facade	SE
3	Hanger #2, west & north facades	SE
4	Stone Hangar, north facade	S
5	Berkhimer House, eastern façade	NW
6	Tenant House, eastern facade	NW

Photographer Name: Robert Wise Date: 5/2001

Negative Location: Robert Wise Consulting, Station Square 1, Suite 104, 37 N. Valley Road, Paoli PA 19301


Key to Photographs
Wings Field
N
75' x 3700' RUNWAY (PROPOSED)
NARCISSA
AVENUE
7AC.
26
51
62
91
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY FORM - DATA SHEET

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Bureau for Historic Preservation

IDENTIFICATION AND LOCATION

Survey Code: 066 Tax Parcel/Other No.: 66-00-04573-00-5 Block Unit #019-019
County: 1. Montgomery 091 2.
Municipality: 1. Whitpain Township 2.
Address: 1501 Narcissa Road Historic Name: Wings Field
Other Name:
Owner Name/Address: Wings Field Preservation Assn LP 1501 Narcissa Rd. Blue Bell PA 19422
Owner Category: x Private ___ Public-local ___ Public-state ___ Public-federal
Resource Category: x Building ___ District ___ Site ___ Structure ___ Object
Number/Approximate Number of Resources Covered by This Form: 11
USGS Quad: 1. Lansdale 2.
UTM References: A. ___ C.
B. ___ D.

HISTORIC AND CURRENT FUNCTIONS

Historic Function	**Category:**	**Subcategory:**	**Code:**
A.	TRANSPORTATION	air-related	16B
B.	DOMESTIC	single dwelling	01A
C.			
D.			

Particular Type:
A. TRANSPORTATION / airport
B. DOMESTIC / house
C.
D.

Current Function Category:	**Subcategory:**	**Code:**
A. TRANSPORTATION	air-related	16B
B. SOCIAL	clubhouse	03B
C.		
D.		

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification:
A. No Style 01 (airport buildings)
B. Georgian 11 (clubhouse)
C.
D.
Other:

Exterior Materials:
Foundation stone 40 Roof tin 54
Walls aluminum 55 Walls stucco 61
Other stone 40 Other

Structural System: 1. steel frame 41 2. stone 22
Width 5 bay Depth Stories/Height 1

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Year Built: ca. 1927 Additions/Alterations Dates: ca.____
Basis for Dating: _x__ Documentary __x__Physical
Explain: Although the Georgian farmhouse was extant in the eighteenth century, perhaps as early as 1776, the property is significant for its twentieth century use as an airport. A PACC leaflet states that the airport was founded in 1927 and that a barn on the property was converted for use as a hangar. The 1935 *Atlas of Montgomery County* shows two hangars, the original terminal building, and the Georgian house.

Cultural/Ethnic Affiliation: 1. _____2. _____Associated Individuals: 1. _____2. _____Associated Events: 1._____2. _____Architects/Engineers: 1._____2. _____Builders: 1. _____2.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

PACC leaflet
Atlas of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Franklin Survey Co., 1935, Vol. B, p. 7.

PREVIOUS SURVEY, DETERMINATIONS

Whitpain Township Historic Resources Survey, 2000

EVALUATION (Survey Director/Consultants Only)

Individual NR Potential: _x__Yes ___No Context(s):_Early American Aviation
Contributes to Potential District ___Yes _x_No District Name/Status:

THREATS

Threats: _2__ 1. None 2. Public Development 3. Private Development 4. Neglect 5. Other

Explain: Potential relocation of the Six-Points intersection may have an impact upon some of the historical resources of the property.

SURVEYOR INFORMATION

Surveyor Name/Title: _Robert Wise___ Date: _____6/16/2001
Project Name: _____Whitpain Township Historic Resource Survey
Organization: _____Robert Wise Consulting/Whitpain Township_____ Telephone: _(610) 722-5818
Street and No.: _Station Square 1, Suite 104, 37 North Valley Road
City, State: _____Paoli, Pa_____ Zip Code: _____19301
Additional Survey Documentation: ___Whitpain Survey Code 066
Associated Survey Codes: _____n/a

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL RESOURCE SURVEY FORM
NARRATIVE SHEET 89C

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
Bureau for Historic Preservation

Survey Code: 066 Tax Parcel/Other No.: 66-00-04573-00-5 Block Unit #019-019
County: Montgomery 091 Municipality: Whitpain Township
Address: 1501 Narcissa Road
Historic/Other Name: Wings Field

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Wings Field owns a 203-acre parcel with a runway running along the northern border and with historic resources along Narcissa Road. There are six airplane hangars oriented perpendicular to, but somewhat near, Narcissa Road and parallel to each other; these hangars are of varying size and width but are primarily large barrel-vaulted buildings with huge T-shaped interior bays for the storage of planes. As the need for additional hangar space grew, the buildings were constructed in parallel fashion from the original two hangers. Hangars 5, 6, and 7 (all noncontributing) are located on higher ground than the other hangars and are accessed by a small flight of stairs near Hangar 4. In addition to the hangars, there are four other resources. The most significant of these other resources is the large terminal/main hangar located to the northeast of the auxiliary hangars. The core of this main hangar is the northern side, which is the original terminal building. The two-story building has a wrap-around porch that originally served as a waiting area. A small Cape Cod house to the east of the terminal/main hangar now serves as a helicopter office building, and the Berkimer farmhouse is used as a clubhouse for an aviation club. The last resource constructed on the property is a new terminal building, which is noncontributing. The individual resources are described in more detail below.

Main Hanger: This building (built c. 1928) is located in the center of the cluster of resources at Wings Field. It is a multi-part building consisting of the original terminal building (now used for offices) attached to the main hangar with some southern one-story additions.

The original terminal building is attached to the north side of the main hangar. It is a two-story, nine-bay element with a flat roof characterized by parapets on the three sides not touching the hangar portion. There is a brick chimney located on the eastern end wall. This unit (and almost all of the remainder of the main hangar) is clad with machine shingles. Windows on the office portion include paired windows on the upper floor. The former terminal section also has a large wrap-around porch on each of the three sides with parapets; this hipped roof element rests upon a series of columns. This porch provided an outside viewing and waiting area.

The center portion of the building is the hangar, where airplanes are serviced. This large barrel-vaulted unit has a large bay on its western side, facing the runway, for the use of airplanes. There are three small windows on this western side of the hangar, but on the southern and eastern sides are several huge windows, including some 32-pane windows. Like the office/terminal portion, the hangar is clad with machine shingles. Although this portion is only one story tall, it is over two-thirds the height of the office portion. There is a series of additions on the southern side of the hangar. Its large hangar doors enable it to service large planes.

All of these additions are one-story, and all but one is clad with machine shingles. The largest of the additions is a large square unit located on the southeastern side of the hangar. This is a flat-roofed element with a door on its eastern wall and a garage door on its southern wall; there is a series of large windows on the southern and eastern walls. A small shed-roofed addition on the end of this larger addition is clad with aluminum siding and has two

double doors with two panels each. This small addition has an asphalt-shingled roof. A flat-roofed addition to the west of the larger addition is a rectangular addition with machine-shingled walls. It has a single door on the western side of its southern wall; another door on this side has been filled in. There are several large windows on this addition.

Although this multi-use resource has several additions, it retains its integrity as a hangar and terminal building as a testament to the continued growth of the airport and the additional services it supplied.

Hangar #1: This is the easternmost of the seven auxiliary hangars (built c. 1945). It is a barrel-vaulted hanger approximately 120 feet long with a row of very large 32-pane windows cut into the sides. The hangar has aluminum siding. Access to the interior is provided by a large sliding door on the western wall which runs on a huge steel track extending past both ends of the building. There is a regular-sized door located in the large sliding door to allow access to the interior without necessitating opening the sliding door.

Hangar #2: This hangar (c. 1945) is located immediately to the west of Hangar #1. It shares most of the characteristics of Hangar #1, the primary exception being that a door is located on its northern side for interior access rather than having the door in the sliding door.

Hangar #3: This is a rare stone hangar (c. 1930) located to the west of Hangar #2. This hangar consists of two parts: a main stone unit on the north and a southern extension with open bays. The main unit of the hangar is a large stone portion with a barrel-vaulted roof. The roof is clad with asphalt shingles. In addition to the stone walls, another interesting feature of this unusual hangar is the brick chimney located at the juncture of the main stone unit and the rear portion. There is a series of three large 32-pane windows on the sides of the hangar, although the third of these large windows has been filled in on the western side. The north façade of this stone portion has two large garage doors, the western of which incorporates a door. The southern extension has a flat roof with three exposed interior bays. This roof rests upon an interior wall and an extension of the stone wall from the stone unit on the eastern side, which runs down about half of a bay. These interior bays are the standard T-shaped bays for small airplane storage. Wooden posts demarcate the divisions between the different bays; some of these posts have braces. The southern wall of the rear portion of the hangar is composed of cinder blocks on the inside with stone outside.

Hangar #4: The fourth hangar (c. 1930) moving westward is a large building in three parts: a cinder block element, the bays, and a stone office on the southern end facing Narcissa Road. The northernmost portion of the building is an almost square unit built with cinder blocks. It has a large open bay on its northern side which reveals interior brick walls. There is a chimney located on the southern portion of this building which cuts through a parapet. The middle portion of the building is composed of a series of large open T-shaped airplane bays; there are four bays on each side of the hangar. This portion has a flat roof and cinder block walls. A portion of this hangar may have been an earlier agricultural building, but this has not been verified.

The southernmost portion of the hangar is the office building facing Narcissa Road. The office has stone walls and a flat roof. In addition, it has a large band of windows running along most of this façade. A projecting vestibule with a large pediment-like hood and a band of large windows dominate its southern façade. The hood is clad with asphalt shingles and has vertical aluminum siding in its tympanum. The door of the vestibule is a solid unpaneled and unglazed door with sidelights located in a slightly projecting stone element.

Hangar #5 (noncontributing): The fifth hangar moving westward sits to the north of another long hangar. Number Five is a long front-gabled hangar with vertical aluminum siding. There are five of the T-shaped airplane bays on each side of the hangar, each with its own small door in addition to the large sliding doors. There is a small gambrel-roofed storage shed on the north side of this hangar.

Hangar #6 (noncontributing): This hangar is located immediately to the south of Hangar #5. This hangar has an unusual profile. Although it has a gabled roof like Hangar #5, Hangar #6 has two immense cross-gables on each side. It has aluminum siding and several large T-shaped airplane bays on the interior. This is one of the hangars which has windows illuminating the interior bays; they are large nine-pane windows.

Hangar #7 (noncontributing): The westernmost hangar is a concrete block building. It has a flat roof with parapet-like end walls and twelve interior bays. The T-shaped interior bays are accessed by the same immense sliding doors which ride upon a steel frame. This hangar has a door on the northern wall and one at the southern end of the western wall.

Berkimer House: The oldest architectural resource on the property is a Georgian style house named the Berkimer house, which is oriented to the east. This house probably had been built when Michael Hawk gave it to his daughter Susannah Berkimer in his will in 1776, although it has been enlarged and altered greatly since that time.

The building consists of a large main block with a side element, a rear ell, and a rear addition. The main block of the house is a two-and-a-half story, five-bay stucco-clad house with a pent roof and dormers. The end-gabled roof is clad with asphalt shingles, has two brick end chimneys, and is framed by a molded cornice. The three roof dormers have pediments with asphalt shingles on their roofs and aluminum walls. Windows on the house are four-over-four with non-functional shutters. A pent roof separates the first two floors and has a small centered gable; the roof is clad with asphalt shingles while the tympanum-like portion of the centered gable is clad with aluminum siding. The door is located in the center bay under the small hood in the pent roof; sidelights and a four-light transom surround this paneled door.

Situated on the northeastern side of the core is the two-story side element. It is stucco-clad and has an asphalt-clad roof with a stuccoed end chimney. This element has a slightly protruding first floor façade, giving the impression that the second floor is set back from the façade. A small roof created by this setback is also clad with asphalt shingles. Windows are much smaller than those on the main block, although they are all two-over-two with nonfunctioning shutters. It is possible that this was the original portion of the house owned by Michael Hawk until 1776.

The rear of the core has been altered by the addition of a cross-gabled element with an end brick chimney. The rear ell addition (c. 1945) is a two-story, two-bay element with a stuccoed end chimney; its roofline only rises to the cornice line of the core. The roof of the ell is clad with asphalt, and the windows are the same as those on the side addition.

In the area between the ell and the core is the one-story addition. This element completes the square footprint of the house on this corner. It consists of a large stucco-clad element with a flat roof and a large bay window. The windows on this addition imitate those of the side addition and the ell, although windows on the bay are eight-over-eight. This large bay has a tripled window on its central panel, beside which is an entry door with a large transom.

While the exterior maintains its architectural integrity, the interior has been highly altered to accommodate dining, office, and social activities of the PACC.

Tenant House: This Cape Cod-style house (now used as a helicopter company office) is located to the south of the Georgian house and is oriented to the southeast. It is a vernacular building with an end-gabled roof and an addition on both sides. The building sits on a stone foundation and is clad with machine shingles. Its exterior end chimney is located on its eastern corner, slightly off center. Windows on the core vary, including an eight-over-eight double hung window, a four-pane casement window, and a six-over-six double hung sash window. Access to the building is provided by a set of three stairs leading to a stoop before the door on the eastern side of the building. This door has nine lights in its upper half and is paneled under the windows. There is a frame railing enclosing the stoop and serving as a handrail for the flight of stairs. A small one-room cross-gabled addition located on the southeastern end of the building has a stucco-clad stone foundation, machine shingle-clad walls, and an asphalt roof. Its end window is a paired six-over-six double hung sash window. There is a protruding element on the northwestern side of the house which provides additional interior space and is located near a small frame porch which provides additional access to the house.

New Terminal Building (noncontributing). This building is located to the north of the main hangar and is a noncontributing resource. [No photo.]

Wings Field has a high degree of integrity. The core of the early airport is extant at Wings Field: the early terminal building and two early hangars. One of these hangars has stone walls (#3), which appears to be rare for an airport building. This hangar was converted from the old barn on the farm. The other hangar (#4) is connected to a stone walled office building facing Narcissa Road. The office section may have been the airport's original office. The original terminal building has been converted to modern offices but retains its integrity, including the large wrap around apron and roof. The hangars exemplify early design of airport hangars, with their large barrel-vaulted roofs and their T-shaped interior bays for plane storage. The airport has grown since the 1930s, with the addition of several newer hangars, a new terminal building, and a large main hangar addition onto the original terminal building. Newer buildings have been constructed away from the historic cluster, with three large hangars to the east and the new terminal to the north. As a result, the noncontributing buildings at Wings Field do not detract from the historic core of the airport.

Additional Photographs

7. Hanger #4 (interior showing T-shaped plane slot), facing SW
8. Berkimer House/Philadelphia Aviation Country Club Clubhouse, south façade (front) facing NW
9. Berkimer House/Philadelphia Aviation Country Club Clubhouse, north (rear)and west façades, facing E
10. Cottage (converted to office), west & south facades, facing NE

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE – WINGS FIELD, PAGE 1

Wings Field is significant under National Register Criteria A and C. As one of the oldest privately owned airports in continuous operation in the nation, it illustrates the early history of aviation and the broad patterns of American history. In addition, the architecture of its resources includes some quite unusual features, including a stone hangar building. The period of significance for this property is 1931—1951.

Throughout its history, Wings Field has been significant for its association with the general trends of American history. Among the earliest pilots at Wings Field were the daredevils called barnstormers who had become popular during World War I. During World War II, Wings Field was a base for training civilian pilots, and after the war it became a center for private flying by returning veterans who had flown during the war. Though mainly used for private flights and pilot training, a Wings-operated commuter air operation operated there in the 1980s. Today the airport is used by Pennstar (University of Pennsylvania Medical Center) medical personnel and pilots who are on call 24 hours per day, seven days a week.

The airport is also significant for other reasons. The largest aviation association in the world is the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA). The organization was founded in 1939 at Wings Field and continues to hold its annual meetings there. The airport's lighting system was developed by Jack Bartow and was duplicated by the U.S. Air Corps on its bases around the world. Other significant organizations and people associated with Wings Field include Narco Scientific Industries (a pioneer in aircraft communications and navigation systems), The Tactair Company, Tasty Baking Company, Crown Cork and Seal Company, and McNeil Laboratories (which later became a division of Johnson & Johnson). Among dignitaries who used Wings Field were Arthur Godfrey, who flew into Wings Field regularly, and Dwight D. Eisenhower and Richard M. Nixon, both of whom landed at Wings Field.

Wings Field is located on land that historically was a series of farms along Narcissa Road. The 109-acre section of Wings Field at the intersection of Narcissa and Stenton Roads was historically the Berkimer farm. This farm existed as early as 1776, when Michael Hawk gave it to his daughter Susannah Berkimer (Montgomery County Deed Book 54, pages 5—7). The farm continued in the Berkimer family until 1837, when Alan W. Corson and Thomas Read purchased it for $5,000. Charles Kerper purchased the farm from Corson and Read in 1861. The farm changed hands several times between the 1861 sale and 1931, when Wings Field Inc. purchased it.

Originally, Wings was based at Central Airport in Camden NJ. Members of the Pylon Club of Patco Field in Montgomery County formed the Wings Corporation in 1929. In 1931 the Wings Corporation purchased the Berkimer Farm (109 acres) and developed Wings Field there. The airport opened with four employees and four airplanes and gliders. In this same year (1931), a group of Philadelphia aviators formed the Philadelphia Aviation Country Club (PACC) and used the old Berkimer farmhouse as its headquarters. Members of PACC included many of the flying elite of Philadelphia, and they used the farmhouse as one of two facilities for food and quarters on long flights. The farmhouse continues to be used for these purposes.

Wings Field has a high degree of architectural integrity and a rare building type – a stone hangar. The core of the early airport is extant at Wings Field: the early terminal building and two early hangars. One of these hangars has stonewalls (#3), which appears to be rare for an airport building. The main hangar was converted from the old barn on the farm. Hangar #4 is connected to a stone walled office building facing Narcissa Road. The hangars exemplify early design of airport hangars, with their large barrel-vaulted roofs and their T-shaped interior bays for plane storage. The original terminal building has been converted to modern offices but retains its integrity,

including the large wrap around apron and roof (providing plenty of shelter for those watching or waiting for airplanes). The airport has grown since the 1930s, with the addition of several newer hangars, a new terminal building, and a large main hangar addition onto the original terminal building. Newer buildings have been constructed away from the historic cluster, with three large hangars to the east and the new terminal to the north. As a result, the noncontributing buildings at Wings Field do not detract from the historic core of the airport.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION – WINGS FIELD, PAGE 3

DEED RESEARCH

1. John Jones sold a farm in Whitpain Township to Michael Hawk; mentioned in Montgomery County Deed Book [MCDB] 54 pages 5—7.
2. Michael Hawk died in 1776. In his will probated on 6-26-1776 he left his farm in Whitpain Township to his daughter Susanna Berkimer. (MCDB 54:5—7).
3. Susanna Berkimer left the property to her children at her death. She died intestate, and no record of the settling of the estate was located.
4. The children of Susanna Berkimer sold the 107 acre farm to Alan W. Corson and Thomas Read on 4-3-1837 for $5000 (MCDB 54:5—7).
5. Alan W. and Mary E. Corson and Thomas Read sold the farm to Charles Kerper on 4-4-1861 for $5554.59 (MCDB 122:282—286).
6. Charles Kerper lost the land as a result of a lawsuit filed by the Washington Benevolent Society of the Township of Whitpain, and the 107 acre farm was sold at sheriff sale to Morris Jarrett on 12-6-1884 (Montgomery County Sheriff Deed Book H page 346). The farm was sold as 109 acres of land rather than the 107 as mentioned in prior deeds.
7. Morris and Sarah E. Jarrett sold the farm to William J. Latta of Philadelphia on 6-12-1903 for $16,200 (MCDB 502:248).
8. William J. and Kitty B. Latta sold the farm to the Philadelphia City, Suburban and Real Estate Company on 9-22-1913 for $1 (MCDB 702:243).
9. The Philadelphia City, Suburban and Real Estate Company sold the farm to Francis J. Sylvester of Philadelphia on 4-30-1915 for $1 (MCDB 731:177).
10. Francis J. Sylvester sold the farm to Frederick M. Leonard of Philadelphia on 7-17-1915 for $1 (MCDB 743:351—353).
11. Frederick J. and Mathilde "Joy" Leonard sold the farm to Bernard Ruckdeschel of Philadelphia on 5-1-1916 for $1 (MCDB 745:27).
12. Bernard and Minnie Ruckdeschel of Philadelphia sold the farm to Henri Merriken of Philadelphia on 1-12-1917 for $1 (MCDB 750:437—439).
13. Henri and Anna S. Merriken sold the farm to John S. Smith on 5-23-1930 for $1 (MCDB 1109:443).
14. John S. and Katharine Snowden Smith sold the farm to Wings Field, Inc. on 5-29-1931 for $1 (MCDB 1127:306—308).
15. Wings Field, Inc. was renamed Wings, Inc. on 6-24-1949.
16. Wings, Inc. sold two parcels of land it owned to Blue Ball Associates on 8-1-1972, including the above mentioned farm and a one-acre parcel of land, for $610,000 (MCDB 3777:65).
17. Blue Ball Associates renamed itself Wings Field Associates between 1972 and 1998.
18. Wings Field Associates sold the airfield mentioned above and three other small parcels of land it owned to the Wings Field Preservation Associates on 10-30-1998 for $1 (MCDB 5249-1454—1463).

SHIPPING
AND
NOTICE
RESTRICTED AREA
AUTHORIZED
PERSONNEL ONLY