

Suggested Guidelines for Documenting Historic Buildings

Lancaster County Planning Commission
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Note: Although these guidelines are based on state standards for documenting historic resources, they are less rigorous than those standards. For that kind of documentation, please refer to *How to Complete the Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form*, Bureau for Historic Preservation, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, November 2014.

The guidelines below were created by Lancaster County Planning Commission (LCPC) staff to assist Lancaster County municipalities in documenting buildings proposed for demolition.

Basic information to record

1. Historic name and/or current name of the building (if no name, skip to #2, and just refer to the building by its address).
2. Street address (if none, describe approximate location in relationship to an intersection or other landmark).
3. Municipality (city, borough, or township). Note: The municipality may not be the same place as the town in the mailing address (for instance, a Rapho Twp. property could have a Mount Joy mailing address).
4. County.
5. 13-digit parcel number from the Lancaster County Property Assessment Office (unless within a public right-of-way, as in the case of a bridge).
6. Parcel size (acreage).
7. Aerial photo (from Google Earth, Bing, etc.) or map of the entire property, with every building and structure identified (main house, garage, barn, icehouse, etc.). Remember to note when the aerial photo was taken.
8. Year when the main building was built and year(s) when any major addition(s) or alteration(s) were made. If this information is available for other buildings and structures on the property, record that as well.
9. Exterior materials (walls, foundation, roof) and structural system (for instance, wood frame or masonry – if known).
10. Number of stories.
11. Number of bays (total number of windows and doors across first floor of the front facade).
12. Date this information was recorded.
13. Name of person who recorded this information.
14. Photographs (see instructions below).

Other useful documents

In addition to recording the information listed above, collect and save any available:

- Site plans and floor plans.
- Photos or scans of historic photographs or drawings, especially images that show how the building and the property have changed over time.

Camera

Type of camera

- Best: digital SLR camera
- Acceptable: digital point-and-shoot camera
- Not acceptable: camera phones, disposable or single-use digital cameras
- Other recommendations:
 - If available, use a non-distorting lens and filter that reduces glare and sharpens contrast.
 - If your camera has GPS capability, enable it so location data is saved for each image (but note the warning in the bullet below).
 - If using a date stamp or GPS stamp, set the camera so this information does not appear within the image itself, but is saved as “exif” data. Having printed information within a photo can be distracting in some contexts.
 - When photographing large properties, consider using a panoramic camera with a tripod.

Capacity

- Best: 6 megapixel or greater camera
- Acceptable: 2- to 5-megapixel camera
- Not acceptable: cameras with fewer than 2 megapixels

Photo resolution

- In general, set the camera for highest image quality (maximum or largest pixel dimension the camera allows). Don't use the JPG setting on the camera, if a higher quality setting is available.
- Best: 6 megapixels or greater (2000 x 3000 pixel image)
- Acceptable: Minimum of 2 megapixels (1200 x 1600 pixel image)

General rules for photos

- Take new photos or use photos taken within the past 12 months.

- All photos should be in focus and properly exposed.
- Be aware of trees, plantings, and snow that may block the view.
- **Important:** As you take photos, keep track of 1) where each photo is taken and 2) which direction the camera is facing (east, west, north, south, etc.). Ideally, the photo locations and camera directions for each photo should be shown on a map (explained later). It's important do this as you take photos, because these details can be difficult to remember later on.

Views (subject matter) for photos

The number of pictures needed to properly document a building or property depends on its size and complexity. For instance, a small urban building may need fewer photos than a farm complex, industrial building, or commercial building. Focus on the elements listed below.

The property as a whole

- Overall setting – the building in relationship to its surroundings, including adjacent streets and nearby buildings.
- All buildings and structures on the property – no matter their condition – including garages, carriage houses, barns, sheds, ice houses, smoke houses, and other outbuildings.
- Prominent landscape features, such as tree-lined approaches, stone walls, gardens, plantings, etc.

Building exterior

- Each facade (each side) of the building.
- Each corner of the building, so two facades are visible at the same time (for instance, front and side).
- Unusual or interesting details, such as a chimney, datestone, gingerbread trim, cupola, steeple, porch, decorative brickwork, etc.
- Front entrance and/or typical doorway.
- A typical window.

Building interior (if allowed by property owner)

- All rooms on all levels, including kitchen, bathrooms, hallways, and stairways.
- Spatial relationship between rooms (i.e., view from one room into the next).
- Unusual or interesting details, such as door hardware, light fixtures, fireplaces, decorative trim (moldings, mantels, interior shutters, ceiling medallions, grain-painted woodwork, etc.).
- Exposed structural framing in basement and attic (if accessible).
- Views of people using the building, if still an active business or residence when photos are taken.

Saving photos

- Ideally, images should be taken and saved as a raw image file or TIFF at a minimum 300 ppi in 8-bit or higher format.
- JPGs can be converted into TIFFs, but be aware that some of the picture quality is lost in the process.
- Rather than using the file name the camera assigns to each photo (such as IMG_2083), retitle the files so they include information about the subject matter. That way, the photo will still be identifiable without referring to a separate list.
 - At a minimum, include the address of the property and a unique photo number.
 - Ideally, the file name should also identify what's pictured – garage, front yard, main house – west facade, etc.
 - For ease of use in graphics programs, don't use spaces in file names – either remove all spaces or substitute with a dash or underscore.
- If you have photo software (Lightroom, Bridge, etc.), add information about the building and property into the exif data for each photo. That way, if the photos are separated from the Word or Excel files, the data will still be available within the image file itself.

Burning to Disk

Although photo files can be saved on a variety of media, digital disks are currently the most archivally stable format available to most consumers.

- Burn the digital photo files to an archival-quality CD or DVD.
 - Best: CD-R Archival Gold or DVD-R Archival Gold disk
 - Acceptable: CD-R, DVD-R, or any disk obtained from a commercial photo processor.
 - Not acceptable: CD-RW or DVD-RW. Do not use "rewriteable" disks.
- Label the disk with the address, municipality, state, and month/year when photos were taken.
 - Best: Use a laser printer to print information directly on the disk (non-adhesive).
 - Acceptable: Write directly on the disk with a Sharpie.
 - Not acceptable: Ammonia/solvent-based markers or stickers.
- In addition to saving these photos as digital files, consider printing them on paper as a backup. Print two photos per page on 8 1/2 x 11 in. paper. For each photo, include a caption with all the information included in the file name.

Photo list / index

- Create a Word or Excel file that lists every photo that was taken. At the top of the file, include this information:
 1. Historic name or current name of building, if any
 2. Street address (if none, describe location)
 3. Municipality, county, and state where the building is located
 4. Photographer name
 5. Date photos were taken
 6. Location where original digital files are stored
- For each photo, list:
 1. Photo number (should be same as number in photo map/key)
 2. Description of view (subject of the photo), such as "150 N. Queen St., west facade."
 3. Direction the camera was facing when the photo was taken – north, southeast, etc.

Note: If you have photo software (Lightroom, Bridge, etc.), add this information to the exif data for each photo. That way, if the photos are separated from the Word or Excel files, the data will still be available within the image file itself.

Photo key

- On a site plan of the property (or floor plan if available), show where each photo was taken. Indicate where the photographer was standing for each photo, number that location with the same number used in the photo list/index, and add an arrow showing which direction the camera was facing. Here's an example:

