

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Whitpain Public School

other names Whitpain High School; 1895 School

2. Location

street & number 799 Skippack Pike

not for publication N/A

city or town Blue Bell (Whitpain Township)

vicinity N/A

state Pennsylvania code PA county Montgomery code 091

zip code 19422

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide x locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Anneka MacDonald
Signature of certifying official

October 23, 2006
Date

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register _____

(See continuation sheet).

___ determined eligible for the _____

National Register

(See continuation sheet).

___ determined not eligible for the _____

National Register

___ removed from the National Register _____

___ other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

___ private

x public-local

___ public-State

___ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

x building(s)

___ district

___ site

___ structure

___ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National
Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Category Education

Subcategory School

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Category

Subcategory

Education

Library

Recreation and Culture

Museum

Social

Meeting Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

Gothic

Queen Anne

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Stone

Roof Wood

Walls Stucco

Other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1895

Significant Date(s)

N/A

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Baker, Victor H.
Shaeff Jr., Walter

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 #6021
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Montgomery County Court House

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>18</u>	<u>476584</u>	<u>4443080</u>	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.						

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John R. Simon
organization Wissahickon Valley Historical Society
street & number 1942 Lafayette Rd.

date 4/12/2006
telephone 610-584-7844

city or town Lansdale

state PA

zip code 19446

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Whitpain Township

street & number 960 Wentz Rd.

city or town Blue Bell

state PA

telephone 610-277-2400

zip code 19422

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 205

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7

Page -1-

Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

The Whitpain Public School is a two-story, stucco-covered stone and brick building of the Late Victorian era with Queen Anne and Gothic Revival influences. The base of the building is thirty-seven feet wide and fifty feet deep, with a fieldstone foundation. The first floor walls are constructed of stone and covered with rough pebble stucco, while the second story employs a Flemish brick bond style. A fancy brick belt course divides the upper and lower stories. On the southern (front) elevation is an entrance porch 8 ½ ft x 33 ½ ft recessed below the second story and enclosed by flanking Gothic arches. Between the front arches, above the entry steps to the porch, the original flat, metal covered lintel and fascia remains with a separate circular medallion at each end. These contain the surface mounted Gothic style letters that read, "AD Public School 1895", indicating its construction date. At the west corner of this same elevation is a notable heptagonal turret which rises from a pendant base. The turret has a conical shaped cedar shingle roof, and the tower contains five casement six light windows. From the top of the pendant to the windowsill there are rows of varying shaped cedar shingles. The site of the Whitpain Public School is on the corner of Schoolhouse Road and Skippack Pike in Blue Bell, PA. The Schoolhouse Road and Skippack Pike sides of the property retain its original perimeter fieldstone walls at the streets edges. The building is next to, but on a separate parcel from the Whitpain Township Consolidated School building. Whitpain Public School is the only building evaluated within this nomination, there are no other non-contributing resources. This building is located across a parking lot at a distance of 45 ft. Behind the consolidated school is a modern school bus garage around one hundred and fifty feet from the Whitpain Public School, which is actively used by the Wissahickon School District, the successor school district of Whitpain. All other out-buildings and the original playground for the Whitpain Public School were removed prior to 1960. A modern garage has been added on to the rear of the Public School, affecting the integrity of the building. Despite the garage addition, the interior and exterior of the building are remarkably original and retain integrity.

On the first floor east elevation, starting from the arched porch opening, there are five windows, all double hung 6/6; the southerly one Gothic arch shaped the other four have flat heads. On the second floor above the porch is a rectangular double hung 6/6 window while over the first floor arched window there is a small diamond shaped four light window. The remaining four windows align with that in the first floor but are double hung 6/6 with a Gothic arch shaped head. The basement has three hopper windows with six lights each, aligned with the windows above. A stairwell leading down to an exterior door, below the first floor Gothic headed window, provides access to the basement.

On the first floor west elevation, starting from the arched porch opening, there is one small six light casement window then three additional double hung 6/6 windows. North of the last of these, a similar window has been modified into an exit door with the original upper sash forming a transom for the door. The second floor is similar to the first except that all windows have Gothic arch shaped heads. Likewise, the northerly window has been modified into an exit door. A steel fire escape leads from each of these exit doors to grade. At first and second floors a triple hung, 6/6/6 Gothic arch shaped window

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7

Page -2-

Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

provides light to the interior stairs. The noted turret is at the south end of this elevation. The basement has four hopper windows with six lights each aligned with the windows above.

The north elevation has a one-story garage, measuring thirty seven by thirty three ft, attached to the rear of the main building, which echoes the appearance of the main building. The garage was designed to serve as a garage. The date of construction is unknown, but it was built before 1940 but after 1920. There are three double hung 6/6 windows, an exit door on the west elevation, and three garage doors on the east elevation.

The interior of the school house has two classrooms, one on each floor; both classrooms still retain their original slate chalkboards. All floors in the school building consist of the original pine tongue and groove flooring. The walls and 11 ft tall ceilings are wet plastered. The original yellow pine wainscoting is intact in all of the rooms and throughout every part of the building. All sashes and most window glass in the school building are original; the windows retain their one-foot deep sills. The chimney and heating grates of the original Smead-type heating system remain.

The front door entrance leads into an ante-room (8 ft x 8 ft). The ante-room has a stairway leading upstairs, a closet (4 ½ ft x 8 ft), a vestibule (3 ft x 12 ft) containing a pine wood stairway leading down to the basement, and a doorway leading to the first floor classroom. In 1984, the anteroom closet was converted into a lavatory. The basement was originally a cafeteria still displaying its original fieldstone foundation, and currently is used for storage.

The first floor classroom (28 ft x 35 ft) originally, was used for grades one through eight. It has four large windows spanning the length of each of the side walls. It retains its original slate blackboards, located in the front of the classroom, a small closet in the rear of the room (6 ft x 7ft), and a bulletin board.

At the stairway intermediate landing, a doorway opens to an octagonal room (the turret) containing a circular wooden staircase leading up to a trap door where the belfry was located. The second floor landing covers a 7 ½ ft x 18 ½ ft area, which partially extends over the porch. A section of the hall with balustrade on the second floor extends over the stairs in a box formation (4 ft x 5 ft). The landing provides entrance into the director's room (11 ft x 16 ½ ft), which has arched windows, a closet, and an entrance through a vestibule area into the second floor classroom. The second floor classroom, also entered from the landing, is 27 ½ x 35 ft, was originally used for grades nine through eleven, and is currently used as a museum. This room has three closets, and is connected by a door and vestibule to the director's room. The vestibule contains a toilet and small sink, installed in 1956. The second floor classroom also has four large windows spanning the length of each of the side walls.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7

Page -3-

Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

The building is in excellent and mostly original condition except for the following changes. Two windows on the west elevation were modified into exit doors leading to a fire escape, constructed circa 1947. Originally the building had a tall Gothic bell tower surmounted by a quill weathervane and catwalk as can be seen in early photographs. The top of the tower was damaged in a severe storm in 1923, and repaired shortly thereafter to the current state without the bell and belfry. The garage attached to the back of the building was modified in 1956 to accommodate a new furnace enclosed within a room. The original Smead-type heating systems still exists intact, less the coal-fired furnace. Installation of steam-fed iron radiators in several parts of the building were likely added in the 1910's. The toilet and small sink in the second floor vestibule between the director's room and classroom was installed in 1956. The small bathroom in the first floor ante-room was installed in 1984.

From 1982 to 1983, a volunteer crew from the society removed the vinyl tiles, which were covering parts of the original wooden floors, stripped and finished much of the interior woodwork (wainscoting) restoring it to the original colors. In 1983, the hip roof of cedar shingles were replaced. In 1986, the outside of the building was painted. In 1987, some of the cedar shingles on the tower were replaced. In 1988, the stucco on the outside of the building was restored. In 1997 and 1998, the interior of the building was painted. During the summer of 2000, the east side elevation of the building was painted for the tricentennial celebration of Whitpain Township. Despite these changes the building still remains in rather good condition and retains integrity.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page- 1 -

Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Whitpain Public School is eligible under Criterion C in the area of architecture as a good example of a late Victorian high style school building. The school exhibits stylistic qualities in its Gothic and Queen Anne detailing, unusual in other schools in the township. This schoolhouse is a transitional school placed in time between the colonial one-room schoolhouses which prevailed in this rural region for more than 130 years, and the Whitpain Township Consolidated School erected in 1916 and opened in 1917. The Whitpain Public School 1895 building was a transition of the one-room school type to a much larger modernized two-story, two-classroom school which provided elementary (grades 1 to 8) and secondary (grades 9 to 11) education. It had a lunchroom in the basement, small side rooms and closets, large windows to provide ample light, and a Smead-type central heating system. The period of significance is 1895, the year of construction.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WHITPAIN PUBLIC SCHOOL

There were five private, independent one-room schools located in Whitpain Township when the Free School Act was passed in 1834. The Center School built in 1800, was located just behind where the Whitpain Public School now stands but was demolished in the 1920's. The James School, built in 1786, was located on Lewis Lane on the property of Dr. James. In 1837, it came under the control of the school district and a year later it became known as the Mount Pleasant School. In 1849, the Mount Pleasant School was moved to Mount Pleasant Avenue on Morris Road, before it was torn down in 1971. The Ellis School, built in 1787, and was open to students from Whitpain, Norriton and Plymouth Townships before being demolished in 1864. The Sandy Hill School was built in 1796 on ground deeded by Joseph Lukens. It was rebuilt in 1859 by the school district and is still in existence as a private home at Five Points near Wings Field Airport. The Centreville School or Centre Square School built in 1825 was located on Skippack Pike above DeKalb Pike. It was rebuilt in 1859, and in 1888 a second story was added at the cost of \$1296.48. This addition became the high school (grades 9 to 11) until the 1895 Whitpain Public School was built. After 1916, the Centre Square School became a private residence. These five schools came under the aegis of the Common School System in May 1836.

Beginning in 1887, the Pennsylvania Legislature passed general laws authorizing the establishment of High Schools. By 1890, there were 180 High Schools in Pennsylvania. Prior to 1890, secondary education in Pennsylvania was carried on largely by academies, which were established throughout the state by groups of local citizens or by religious denominations. The school directors in Whitpain Township determined the need for a larger, modern school building. In 1895, the Whitpain Public School building was built on the corner of Skippack Pike and School Rd. in Blue Bell. The school was designed by Victor H. Baker, and builder was Walter Shaeff of Blue Bell. Local artisans assisted them

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page- 2 -

Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

including Benjamin Franklin Famous and Henry Steinbright, both from Blue Bell. The school was dedicated on November 20, 1895. The master of ceremonies was Mr. William D. Beyer. Ceremonies included addresses from the County Superintendent R. F. Hoffeckers, and a historical sketch of the public schools of Whitpain by Hon Jones Detweiller, Secretary of the School board. The school was described as "rather an artistic modern school building having somewhat of a Moorish appearance". When erected the building cost \$3698.54; front stone wall and grading cost \$231.82. The money for its construction came directly from the teacher's own salaries; the school board cut salaries from \$45 a month to \$40 a month for a period of ten years. Mr. William D. Beyer was appointed as the first principal and teacher.

Students on the lower end of the Township went to Ambler High School for twelfth grade; those in the upper part of the Township went to Norristown High School. There were 30 to 40 students in the classroom depending on the chores and whether it was planting or harvesting time on the farm. The upper grades, nine to eleven had 18 to 20 students. The principal, William D. Beyer rode his horse and wagon each day to school from E. Norriton. There were no lighting devices, no electricity, and no plumbing in the building. There were two small outside sheds used as lavatories; one for the boys and girls (torn down). Drinking water was available at a pump located outside of the building.

In 1916, the school board decided to consolidate six neighboring elementary schools, and the Whitpain Township Consolidated School building was erected in 1916. It was constructed adjacent (45 feet) to the Whitpain Public School building. It was a modern two-story brick building containing four classrooms plus ancillary rooms, and was built with electricity, plumbing, and steam-radiator heating. In September, 1917, the new Whitpain Township Consolidated School opened for grades 1 to 8, while the Whitpain Public School building housed the high school grades 9 to 11. After the consolidation in 1917, William D. Beyer became Assistant County Superintendent of Schools under A.M. Kulp. When the Whitpain Township Consolidated School building became overcrowded in 1924, the first floor of the Whitpain Public School was used for 4th and 5th grade. In 1929, a back section was added to the rear of the 1916 building. It had additional classrooms on three floors, an auditorium and a cafeteria in the basement. The new combined building took over operations for elementary and high school grades, and the Whitpain Public School building was used only for auxiliary purposes at this point.

Following the period of significance, the Whitpain Public School building was used intermittently as a public school over the years as follows. In 1947, because of increased enrollment in the Whitpain School District, the 1895 Whitpain Public School building was reopened for the fifth and sixth grades. In 1957, as the population increased and Whitpain Township became more developed, the new schools of Blue Bell Elementary School (Symphony Lane), Shady Grove Junior High School (Skeppack Pike at Lewis Lane), and Stony Creek School (Yost Road) were built. The Whitpain Public School became the Township Administration Building and Police Station from the period 1957 through 1967. For a short

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page- 3 -

Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

period in the early 1960's, the Wissahickon School district held kindergarten classes and special education classes on the first floor. The last kindergarten class was held for part of the school year in 1963. From 1967 through the 1981 it housed the Whitpain Branch of the Wissahickon Library. On July 27, 1981, Whitpain Township purchased the property from the Wissahickon School district for \$500.

The Wissahickon Valley Historical Society has preserved and continues to maintain the building using it as a focal point in the township. Currently, it continues to educate the public as it serves as a museum with artifacts on local history and a library with books and documents focusing on the genealogy and history of the area. The integrity and unique architectural style contribute to the buildings significance. The overall design of the building gives it an appearance which is exotic and drastically different from anything which is seen in Pennsylvania. Add to this the fact that this building served as an educational facility. The turret is another intriguing design, which was created after the original cupola was struck by lightning. Another unique architectural feature which contributes to its architectural significance is the fact that the water table and stance of the building are so high. The mixing of gothic and queen elements creates a structure which is not seen too often. The Whitpain Public school was created during a time when pattern books for educational buildings were extremely popular. This structure does not appear to have originated from such, thus reinforcing the ingenuity of the builder Victor Baker. For these facts the alone, the exterior architectural design is significant enough to present a solid argument for Criterion C.

The Whitpain Public School 1895 building served as a school building specifically built to succeed the one-room schoolhouses prevalent in this rural region of Pennsylvania. In contrast, several schoolhouses of this era and region often consisted of a series of additions to the one-room buildings. The Whitpain Public School also has an unique and striking architecture not seen in any school building in the area. It is the only surviving school building of this era, in at least the areas immediately surrounding Whitpain.

Ambler is a nearby town to the northeast of Whitpain. Ambler and Whitpain are currently incorporated into the Wissahickon School District. In 1881, the Ambler Independent School District was incorporated. Under the school boards direction, a one-room schoolhouse was erected and completed in 1881 by the builder Albert Beck. It was a one-room, 1-story building with 14 ft high ceilings, slate roof, stone walls, and wainscoting inside. Due to school population growth and needs, the one-room school was partitioned into two rooms. In 1891, the building was expanded by a two-story addition with a total of six rooms. In 1896 another addition was built, and the building was used as an elementary and high school (grades 9-12). The Fire Association of Philadelphia in 1896 described the school building as follows:

"On a two story stone slate roofed building 81 feet by 34 feet with a two story slate roofed building attached to rear of main building 46 by 64 feet. Situate on lot corner of Forrest Avenue and Spring Garden Street [Ambler]"

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page- 4 -

Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

This school was used until 1926 whereupon the entire building burned to the ground. In 1926 the Forrest Avenue School was built on the site.

The Mattison Avenue School building was built in 1903 and was used exclusively as an elementary school. Concurrently, the Ambler Public School building became the high school. The Mattison Avenue School was a 2-room schoolhouse, one classroom on each of the two stories. In the 1920's, the building added another 2-room, 2-story structure. The entire building was demolished in 1967, being replaced by the Mattison Avenue Elementary School in 1966 on adjacent ground.

Lower Gwynedd is a rural region located between Whitpain and Amber, PA. In Lower Gwynedd from 1900 to 1919 there were 4 schools: Cedar Hill, Dager, Maple Grove and Penllyn. Each was a small school. Maple Grove is now a residence, the Cedar Hill School was torn down, Dager School (1860) was built upon several times and has been used as various restaurants, while the original Penllyn school is still in existence. A new Penllyn school was built about 1923, and the Spring House School opened in 1928. The school system in Lower Gwynedd was relatively underdeveloped, and eventually the entire school system incorporated into the Wissahickon School district.

Adjacent to Whitpain in the north is the town of Lansdale. In 1871, the Lansdale Independent School District was formed in anticipation of the incorporation of Lansdale in 1872. A one-room schoolhouse was built, and in 1873 a second story was built. In 1886, the Broad Street School was built on 2nd and Broad St in Lansdale. It was a two-story brick and stone building with a basement, 8 classrooms, a bell tower, and several chimneys. Children attended this school for elementary and high school (9-12 grade). The building was torn-down in the 1950's. The Green Street School was built in 1898, and was of very similar structure and design as the Broad Street School. It became the elementary school in 1906, before being torn down in the 1950's. The Lansdale High School was built in 1906, and was an approximately 16 classroom building with a single, large central staircase. In 1930, the Lansdale building was changed to a middle school before burning down in 1946.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page - 1-

Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page - 2-

Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

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Section 10 Page -1 Whitpain Public School
Montgomery County, PA

The identified boundary is recorded in Deed dated July 27, 1981 Montgomery County PA, Book 4650 page 415 from Wissahickon School District to Whitpain Township. The property includes the Whitpain Public School building and attached garage, and surrounding property of total 2/3 acre.