

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCERS use only

received

date entered

# 1. Name

historic Cain House; Alexander Creel Tavern

and/or common St. Marys Lodge #41 A.F. &amp; A.M.

# 2. Location

street &amp; number Creel Street (southwest corner) at Riverside Dr. not for publication

city, town St. Marys \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district First

state West Virginia code 54 county Pleasants code 073

# 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Fraternal Lodge

# 4. Owner of Property

name St. Marys Lodge #41 A.F. &amp; A.M.

street &amp; number P.O. Box 91

city, town St. Marys \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state West Virginia 26170

# 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pleasants County Court House

street &amp; number Court Lane

city, town St. Marys \_\_\_\_\_ state West Virginia 26170

# 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title \_\_\_\_\_ has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records \_\_\_\_\_

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Cain House, also called the Alexander Creel Tavern, occupies a picturesque lot at the northwest end of Creel Street in the oldest section of St. Marys, county seat of Pleasants. The large red brick building faces Creel Street opposite the point of Riverside Drive's intersection with Creel Street on a high bank overlooking the Ohio River and the southern tip of Middle Island. Events and personages significant in local history are associated with the Cain House, built in 1850, though the old landmark's renown is perhaps as evenly measured by the common hospitality offered packet boat passengers, draymen, and townspeople when the Cain House served as an important hotel on the St. Marys waterfront in the late 19th century. The building continues in active use as headquarters for the local Masonic order, and as a despository for local memorabilia, artifacts and antique furniture.

With the mid-20th century acquisition of the building by the Masons work was undertaken to stabilize the structure. Minor exterior and interior alterations have permitted the Cain House to retain much of the architectural integrity and ambience of its 19th century design. Significant in this respect are the clean lines and pronounced symmetry of the front elevation. The unusually expansive and linear quality of this wall surface filled with broad double-hung windows immediately identifies the utilitarian character of the building and lends it its essential character.

End walls of the Cain House reveal subtle dissimilarities. The southeast end is essentially blind save for a double-hung attic window and a first floor service entrance. Raking cornices are shallow and plain in contrast to full cornices and prominent empty friezes of the river-end and Creel Street facades. Because the building was designed to be seen from the river and from the northeast, these major elevations were finished with greater detail.

Though the rectilinear quality of the building is apparent (as seen from the top), the Cain House is technically an "L". The river end wall is a full bay greater in width than its southeast counterpart. The corresponding angle formed by this arrangement is filled with a two-tier porch, the dominant feature of the rear elevation.

The Cain House is a two-story, gable-roofed structure with a prominent center hall. A recessed entrance with paneled reveals, transom and sidelight is centered in the eight-bay front facade. Windows are headed with finely dressed sandstone lintels and supported with similarly fashioned sills. Two secondary front entrances, each within the outermost bays of the wall, were possibly necessary for the convenience of hotel guests whose numbers and irregular traffic would otherwise have congested the center hall. Paired doorways beneath a single-story porch on the river side of the Cain House would also suggest a similar purpose, for these doors apparently opened into the tavern area of the building. It is also possible that one of the front secondary entrances was intended to provide access to the tavern keeper's private quarters.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Cain House, St. Marys, Pleasants County, West Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

The survival of original woodwork in the center hall, open stairwell and upper landings reveal elements of late Greek Revival influence (The exterior may be said to bear some vernacular design features of the late Greek Revival), though major alterations in areas on the northwest side of the hall prevent assessment of the original appearance of this space.

Woodwork in the rooms to the left (southeast) of the first floor hallway is expansive, bold, but quite plain. Window and door openings are crowned with simple cornices. The removal of a partition(s) in the space to the right (northwest) of the entrance hall created a social hall for the fraternal lodge. The large single room thus created occupies the former tavern room(s) area of the Cain House; it is embellished with a pressed tin ceiling of uncertain date. A similar alteration on the floor immediately above organized the space for the formal Masonic Lodge Hall.

Centered at the rear of the hallway-foyer a four-run, open-string stair rises in an open well to the unfinished attic. The woodwork is subdued but singularly impressive with slender white square balusters, a molded rail (natural finish), and a finely finished newel with ball finial. The stringer is decorated with varnished brackets, while the base moldings of the stair landings are accented with a wave-pattern fret applique.

Upon the wall of a small room at the head of the stairs on the second floor is the penciled signature of Henry C. Creel and the date, March 31, 1851. This grafitto was inscribed by Henry Clay Creel (1829-1906), the son of the founder of St. Marys, Alexander Creel. (The building was constructed for Alexander Creel in 1850). The historic signature was uncovered during a 20th century renovation of the chamber and is protected by a glass frame installed by the Masonic Lodge.

Fireplace openings have been altered by the present owners. Twin, interior chimneys, originally providing heat for the rooms to the southeast of the center hall, rise above the raised-seam metal roof with cement parged caps.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1850

Builder/Architect

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The imposing two-story red brick building at the northwest end of Creel Street in St. Marys, county seat of Pleasants, was built in 1850 for Alexander H. Creel, the founder of St. Marys and a prominent mover of events that resulted in the formation of Pleasants County in 1851. Events significant in the political and social history of the community are associated with the building that stands immediately above the once bustling river landing. Though the Creel and Cain family proprietorships of the 19th century fostered a prosperous hotel-tavern business in the building, the history of the locally significant landmark has witnessed different and quieter circumstances during the latter 20th century. Since 1957, the Cain House has been home to St. Marys Lodge, No. 41, A.F. and A.M.

The Cain House is one of only several buildings surviving from the settlement period of St. Marys. Creel Street, in the early years of the town, was the principal business thoroughfare along which passed much of the traffic in agriculture and timber products that bolstered the economy of the community of only several hundred people. The Cain House, with its tavern and rooms, was thus a focal point of activity for town merchants, local politicians and travellers. The prosperity of the hotel was particularly influenced by the daily trips of small steamboats that linked the towns of the Ohio Valley. By the 1880's, the Cain House, with several stores on Creel Street, erected oil lamp street lights enclosed in square glass cases atop tall posts adding to the security and refinement of the neighborhood and necessary to the attraction of additional business.

Pleasants County, named in honor of James Pleasants, Governor of Virginia from 1822 to 1825, was created from the western Virginia counties of Wood, Tyler and Richie. Efforts to form the county were led by Alexander H. Creel, Thomas Browse, Edmund Riggs and Daniel Reynolds, several locally influential property owners.

The county seat of St. Marys, originally called St. Mary, was founded in 1849, two years prior to the formation of the county, by Alexander Creel upon land that had been purchased by the Creel family when they entered the area from eastern Virginia in 1834. Although this property was sold by Creel in 1837, he repurchased it in 1849 and ordered the parcel to be surveyed and platted when prospects for the creation of a county brightened.

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Cain House, St. Marys, Pleasants County, West Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

Legislative bills, no.s 349 and 350, were introduced into the Virginia House of Delegates during the session of 1850-51 for the purpose of creating Pleasants County and incorporating the town of St. Marys. The Act forming the county of Pleasants out of parts of Wood, Tyler and Richie counties was passed by the Virginia General Assembly on March 29, 1851. The act incorporating "The Town of Saint Mary" was passed by the General Assembly on March 31, 1851.

The residence and tavern built for Alexander Creel in 1850 was the site of the first court of Pleasants County. Chapter 27, Acts of the Virginia General Assembly for the session 1850-51, stipulated: "The justices of the peace commissioned and qualified as aforesaid shall meet at the house owned by Alexander H. Creel, in the town of Saint Mary, on Thursday after the second Monday of May next [May 15], and a majority of them being present, they shall proceed to appoint a clerk of the county court, and such officers as now required by law ...". Alexander Creel and his son, Henry C. Creel, played important roles in the organizational affairs of the county, and each held positions of trust in the government of the county in subsequent years.

It will be recalled that Henry C. Creel's penciled signature and date, March 31, 1851, on the wall of the small room at the head of the stairs in the Cain House, commemorated an event of some obvious local significance. This marking was, in fact, the date of the official incorporation of the town of St. Marys.

A quaint and enduring legend is often told regarding the circumstance of the founding of St. Marys. The story is best recorded in the writings of journalist and historian, Robert L. Pemberton. Though questioning the validity of the founding legend, Pemberton regarded it "as interesting and perhaps as authentic as many of the stories related of cities greater than St. Marys." In the words of Pemberton (Pemberton's A History of Pleasants County, West Virginia, p.64):

It is said that Mr. Creel, who was engaged in business along the Ohio, was traveling by steamer to Wheeling. In his sleep one night a vision of the Virgin Mary appeared to him to look upon the Virginia side of the river.

"There," said she, "you will behold the site of what some day will be a happy and prosperous city."

(11/78)

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

The memory of his vision never left him. He returned and bought the land. For some reason unknown, he was temporarily diverted from the purpose of founding a city there, for he sold the tract to Hugh L. Pickens, and located a mile below at the mouth of Greens Run; but in 1849 he came back, repurchased that portion of the land on which St. Marys was first marked out, and devoted his energies to the fulfillment of his dream, naming the place in honor of the Mother of Our Lord.

Alexander Creel's tavern has been known for many years as the Cain House. It was named for Zachariah Cain and his family who were known to have held proprietorship as early as 1875. The hotel continued to operate as the "Cain House" into the early 20th century, though by this time it had apparently fallen out of Cain family hands. Prior to the acquisition of the building by the Masons in 1957, the structure was owned for a time by another fraternal order, the Maccabees.

Adjacent to the Cain House, overlooking the Ohio River, is a hand-quarried mill stone upon which is attached a bronze plaque with an inscription marking the site as the place where George Washington landed, October 26, 1770, on his famous Ohio River journey. Washington, accompanied by a friend, Dr. James Craik, and attendants, was exploring and locating lands for himself in the Ohio and Kanawha Valleys.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

Bibliography Continued

Journal of the House of Delegates for the Session of 1850-51.

Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1850, pp. 449-50.

Pemberton, Robert L. A History of Pleasants County. St. Marys,

West Virginia: The Oracle Press, 1929, pp. 44-47, 53-55, 62-67,  
95, 106.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, 1850-51. Chapters 27, 265. Richmond Va.; William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1851.  
Hardesty, H.H. and Co., Historical 1882 Hand-Atlas. (Reprinted history of Pleasants County), copied by L.E. Watson, n.d.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre

Quadrangle name Raven Rock, Ohio-West Virginia

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A 

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4	8	1	9	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

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**Verbal boundary description and justification** The Cain House National Register boundary line begins at the point of intersection of Creel St. with Riverside Dr. (northwest corner) and proceeds 150' southeast, 150' southwest, 150' northwest, and 150' northeast to form a square.

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rodney S. Collins, Architectural Historian

organization Historic Preservation Unit

W.Va. Dept. of Culture & History date February 26, 1980

The Cultural Center

street & number Capitol Complex

telephone 348-0244

city or town Charleston

state West Virginia 25305

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Clarence Morrow*

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date May 2, 1980

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

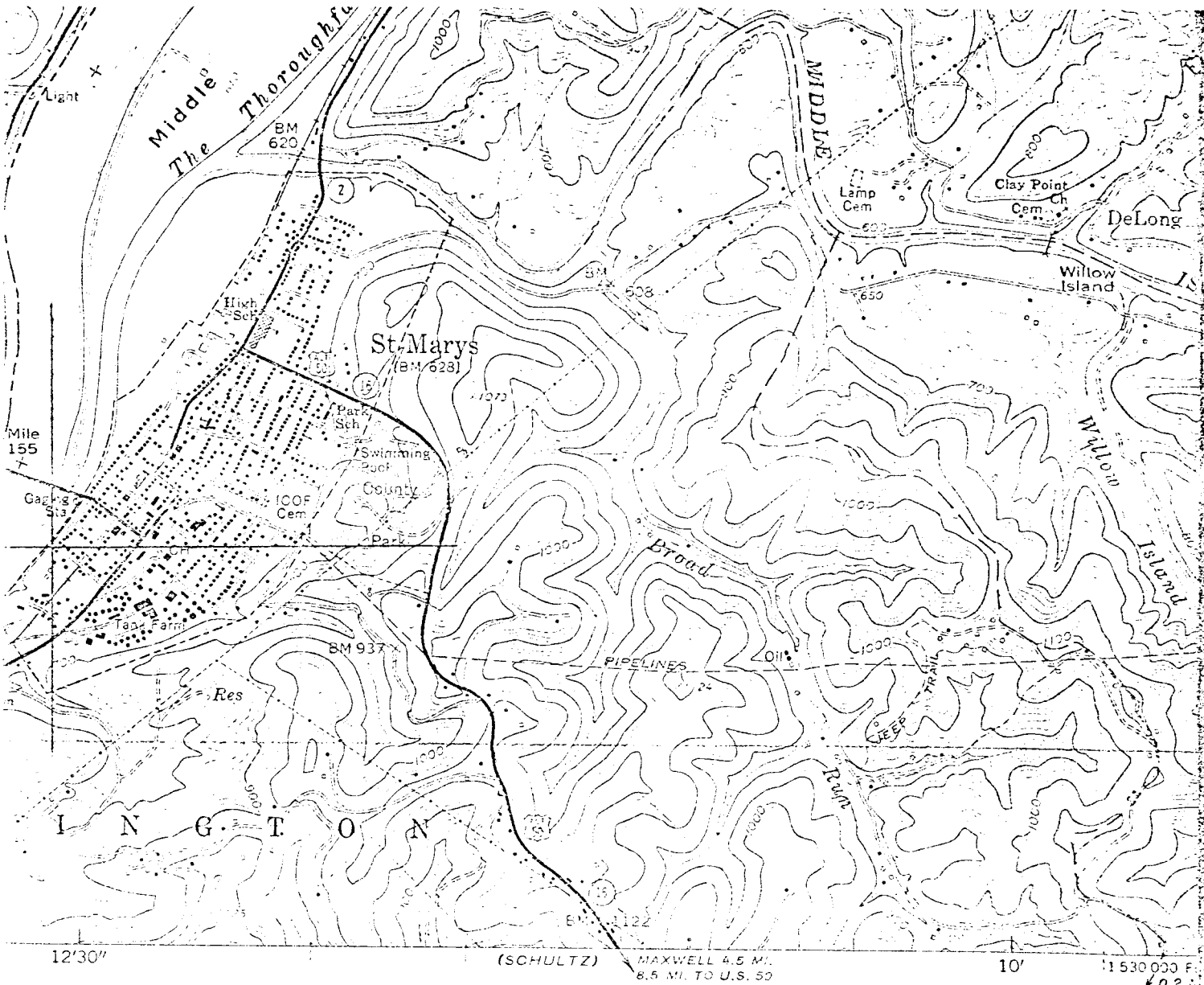
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

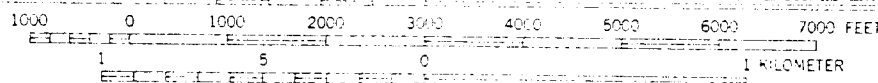
date

Chief of Registration





SCALE 1:24,000



CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET  
 DOTTED LINES REPRESENT 10-FOOT CONTOURS  
 DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL

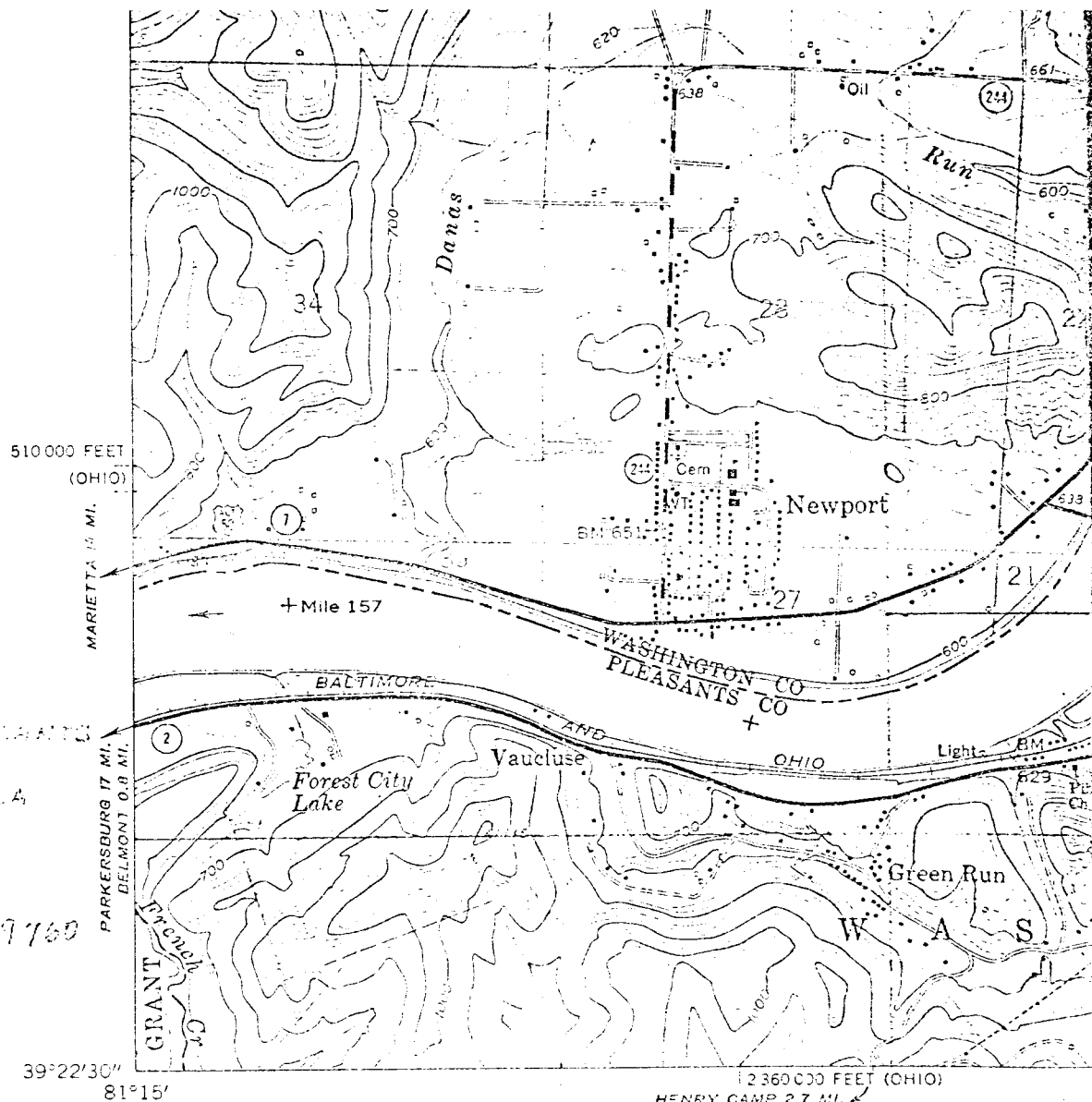
THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

PRECISION  
 4 Bethany

CAIN HOUSE  
 CROSSL STREET  
 ST. MARKS, MOUNTAIN  
 CO.  
 WEST VIRGINIA

UTM  
 17/481940/4359760

(WILLOW ISLAND)



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS, USC&GS, and USCE

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1956. Field checked 1961

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
 10 000-foot grids based on Ohio coordinate system, south zone,  
 and West Virginia coordinate system, north zone  
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
 zone 17, shown in blue

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked

The state line as shown represents the approximate position of the low water line as determined from U.S. Corps of Engineers Ohio River charts, surveyed 1913, and supplementary information

Ohio area lies within the Old Seven Ranges

Land lines based on the Ohio River Base

Unlabeled wells are oil wells

3'5"  
 TRUE NORTH  
 MAGNETIC NORTH  
 APPROXIMATE ME  
 DECLINATION, 19



