

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

Sistersville Historic District

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

From the north side of Catherine St. on the south through the north side of Virginia St. on the north. From the Ohio River on the west to the west side of Chelsea St. on the east. District is to include St. Paul's Episcopal Church at 313 N. Wells St.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Sistersville

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

West Virginia

CODE

54

COUNTY

Tyler

CODE

095

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Multiple Uses

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Multiple Ownership

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Tyler County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Middlebourne

STATE

West Virginia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE An Historic Preservation-Economic Development Study for Sistersville,  
West Virginia

DATE

1971

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☒ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Van Trump, Ziegler and Shane, Inc.

CITY, TOWN

Pittsburgh

STATE

Pennsylvania

# 74 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" 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

Sistersville was a small river town until the wealth of an oil boom era produced an expansion of great proportions. Prior to the early 1890s, only a few substantial buildings existed, but a boom in construction--from the jerry-built shack of the transient worker to the massive and pleasing lines of eclectic commercial and residence units in brick and frame--resulted from application of a new found well of material resources. The Sistersville of today remains much the same as the town which existed by 1910. Signs of wealth appear in the turn-of-the-century commercial and residence buildings, and, interestingly enough, some of the old frame houses on the edges of the district (located generally in the so-called Stocking addition to the original town) still stand as a tribute to the role of the "little man" in the boom.

Among the most prominent architectural styles are Greek Revival, Mid-Century Eclecticism, Romanesque and Nineteenth Century Eclecticism. All inland American river towns founded in the early nineteenth century have some things in common, and not the least of these is the architectural style known as the Greek Revival (usually in its vernacular manifestations). Sistersville has several examples of this, most notably at 107 Catherine Street and 508 Wells Street. The former is known as the Russell Building or Daily Oil Review Office and is located near the ferry slip on the Ohio River. It is a four-bay, two-story brick house (built about 1832) joined by another section of two bays. Constructed of locally fired brick, the building has simple lines with an elaborate corbeled-brick cornice and interestingly designed slate roof (added in 1890) with colored plates forming flower-like units. The McCormick/Henderson House at 508 Wells, constructed about 1880-84, is more Queen Anne with its remodeling of 1895, but it preserves some revival details in its pilastered corners, returned cornices and multipaned windows.

Mid-Century Eclecticism is displayed in vernacular Italianate Revival derived from the Italian Renaissance and in the Gothic Revival. The Gothic Revival is present in the charming "carpenter" Gothic of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church (c. 1885) and the house next to it at 315 Wells Street. The second mentioned house combines Gothic with certain Italianate stylistic elements, a theme even more ebulliently displayed in the McKay/Miller residence at 816 Main Street. The stick work in the apexes of the gables combine with the fine classical porch and conical turret to produce an eclectic dwelling with a charming provincial tone and bravura.

Elements of the Romanesque are numerous. The Richardsonian manner appears most notably in the three-story, red brick Main Street School (formerly Sistersville High School) of 1896, whose soaring bulk and thin towers challenged the omni-present oil derricks for superiority. On each elevation there is a central pavilion which exhibits most of the cliches of the Richardsonian style, the round-arched windows, the turrets, the Syrian arches all done in rock-faced masonry. The best of these pavilions is that on the rear elevation where an interesting arrangement of windows in the gable is flanked by two huge chimney stacks.

Combination of the Romanesque and the academic Italian Renaissance Revival has a Sistersville example in the Union National Bank Building at Wells and Diamond Streets. Here the Richardsonian round-arched windows and the rock-faced masonry are relieved by Renaissance-inspired carving on smooth stone and a Colossal Ionic order of engaged pilasters on the second and third floors. The main entrance itself is an intriguing combination of rock-faced masonry and bland Ionic pilasters.

In the middle of town there are a number of large and commodious residences much towered, turreted, gabled and chimneyed in the asymmetrical Richardsonian manner, but

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PAGE one

7. DESCRIPTION (continued)

also displaying numerous stylistic details of both the Academic Italianate and Colonial Revivals. Two frame houses of this type--519 Main Street and 410 Wells Street (Magnolia Manor Nursing Home)--are especially noteworthy, both in their form and rich variety of architectural reference. A particularly fascinating amalgam of Richardsonian and Colonial Revival motifs is the yellow brick house at 518 Main Street.

The City Building (presently in the National Register of Historic Places) of 1897 on the Diamond is another evidence of the town's prosperity and a rather charming example of the full-blown American Colonial Revival. Erected on the plot originally intended for the county's courthouse, it does exemplify in a rich but tasteful manner the new municipal prosperity. Recalling in its stone-trimmed red brick walls the High Georgian manner of the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century, it is rather original in plan with its three-sided "bays" on each elevation.

Some of the commercial architecture of the period is of considerable interest, notably the Hennaghan-Daly Block of 1896 at Wells and Charles streets. This structure is rather typical of American "business blocks" of the time. The most noticeable dimension of the two-story building is its liberal horizontality relieved by the strong vertical accents of the tall paired windows of its second floor. The detailing is both Richardsonian and Classical, interpreted by the severe practicality of the builders.

Another building of the same type is the three-storied Wells Inn (presently in the National Register of Historic Places) of 1894 at Charles and Chelsea streets. It essentially reflects a late Victorian utilitarianism in its rather severe facade which has been relieved by a white Classical porch.

Sistersville is basically a representative of quick wealth applied to the commercial and residential styles of the time. Variety is found in the older, pre-boom buildings like the Daily Oil Review structure and the Riverside Mill of 1852. Ostentatious designs depicted in window treatments, exterior woodworkings and various-shaped turrets add to the grandeur of location. To all may be juxtaposed the quickly constructed oil shacks which still exist as the main units of several Virginia Street homes.

Among those properties which present good examples of the styles of Sistersville are the following:

1. Ferry Landing Site (Catherine Street at the Ohio River)--Being located along the Ohio River, Sistersville has received and shipped goods by water since its founding in the early nineteenth century. A ferry still crosses between this location and the Ohio side, but its importance here is recalled in the brisk activity which must have been prevalent during the oil-boom period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Equipment for the wells, men to operate the machinery and goods to provide for everyday living would have been brought in, and a variety of oil products were probably shipped from here.

2. Catherine Street Oil Derrick (Riverside Drive and Catherine Street)--This marks the site of one of the early oil wells drilled in the period shortly after 1890

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7. DESCRIPTION (continued)

in the active and productive Sistersville Field. It was brought in at the remarkably shallow depth of 1400 feet in "Big Injun Sand" by the local firm of Tuel and Thoenen. The original derrick, placed on what was lot #1 in the Sistersville plat, was of wooden timbers, but it was replaced in the twentieth century with the more common metal structure and associated engine house as the well continued to produce into the 1960s.

3. Riverside Mill (Riverside Drive near the foot of Hill Street)--The mill, now looking like an old storage barn, was constructed in 1852 to serve the pre-boom Sistersville agricultural area. In its three-story frame section were housed flour and feed machinery, while a two-story addition contained office and storage space. Despite its long existence, the wooden building of today is basically that which stood in 1852 and served the community throughout the oil-boom era.

4. Russell/Daily Oil Review Building (107 Catherine Street)--The Russell brothers, pioneer merchants in the Sistersville settlement, constructed the original portion of this structure about 1832 of locally fired brick. Built on a cut-stone foundation, the front had four openings on each of its two floors (three windows and door on the first level, four windows on the second) and chimneys in the gables. Sometime after construction, it was joined by another two-story brick unit with two openings on each floor and a chimney in its gable. Bonding is common, and there is some elaborate corbeled-brick work in the cornice. A slate roof with designs in various colors was placed over the whole about 1890. There are brick and wood additions at the rear, and the structure is now primarily used for storage.

5. 605 Riverside Drive--This is another of the few remaining pre-boom Sistersville houses. It is a two-story brick structure laid in Flemish bond and now painted grey. There are white frame porches on two sides and some fine carpentry detail on the second floor. At one time, the house contained a printing shop on the first floor and served as a residence on the second.

6. McKay/Miller Residence (816 Main Street)--Built in 1884, this house is an interesting example of carpenter's Gothic with added elements of the late nineteenth century eclectic styles. Dual, pointed-arch windows are under the gable on the front, there are two gables on the north side, and a gable on an indented section on the south side meets a gable from that side of the main house. All gables are bracketed and include elaborate stick work. There are two high, ornamented brick chimneys. A three-sided bay is on the first floor of the front; a porch (added about 1897) extends from the bay around to the north side and includes a conical turret. A carport has been added to the south side in recent years. Another feature of this residence (quite common to many of the homes of the period) is the brick carriage house to the rear which now serves as garage and storage area.

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PAGE three

7. DESCRIPTION (continued)

7. Graham Residence (718 Main Street)--This two-story, frame house was built about 1895 and contains many features of the asymmetrical architecture of Queen Anne style. Irregularity of plan, different sized windows (some with small panes of glazed glass in the upper portion), projecting bays, multiple roofs and an octagonal tower are all present. At one time, the porch which surrounds two sides of the house had a rounded cap on the same corner as the turret, but this has been removed in recent years.

8. City Building (on the Diamond)--A red brick and stone building of two stories, the city hall of 1897 is located on a circular piece of land. Essentially a square in design with a three-sided bay on each elevation, the arrangement of building and ground present an elaborate geometry--a symmetrical, polygonal building within a circle. A high stone foundation requires the use of steps as an approach to doors on the first floor of each bay, and the second floor of each has one window on the sides and two on the front. All openings use a keystone lintel or arch. There is a stone course between first and second floor and at the bracketed cornice. The roof is steep and at one time had a small, open cupola which has been removed in more recent years.

9. Wells House (809 Main Street)--Built about 1900, this two-and-one-half-story brick structure has many details which are interesting, including several three-sided projections from the main lines, high brick chimneys, a steep hipped roof, great dormers with shingle siding and straight gabled fronts, heavy brackets under the deep overhang on the cornice of the facade, and a large porch supported by classical columns. It is representative of the many fine residences constructed along the main street as the wealth of the oil boom began its grander applications within the community.

10. 519 Main Street--Another frame residence of the mid-1890 period, this has a number of the High Victorian elements especially associated with the Queen Anne style. Asymmetrical in design with horizontal board siding and shingles on its gables, the building has bay and tower projections, the latter being a three-story octagonal unit with steep cap. A deep porch is on the Main and Elizabeth Street sides. What adds a bit of attraction to the property is the small, one-story building at the rear of the lot which served for many years as the office of Dr. West, builder of the main house.

11. Main Street School (501 Main Street)--Probably the largest building in town, the old high school is an interesting and effective provincial essay in the Richardsonian Romanesque tone at a time (1896) when the style was beginning to fall out of fashion. Of two stories with an attic, the structure is somewhat too tall for its width. Windows are high and narrow with transoms; walls are of brick trimmed with stone in the usual Richardsonian manner. The entrance facade has an elaborate three-story central pavilion that features Richardson's Syrian arch and two low, rather cramped towers. The best design feature of the building is the large gabled protuberance with its bold fenestration between two high chimney stacks on the rear elevation--

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7. DESCRIPTION (continued)

this construction balancing the pavilion at the front.

12. Virginia Street "Oil Shacks"--There are several of these small, frame structures along Virginia Street (e.g., 111, 105, 124 and 127 Virginia Street) which are typical of the "oil shacks" which served as "temporary" housing during the oil-boom days of the 1890s and early twentieth century. Cheaply and quickly constructed, these buildings were usually of vertical boards and battens. Inside, the boards of the exterior were merely covered with muslin and/or wallpaper. Those still standing have been strengthened and remodeled to a good extent (new roofs, paneling on the interior, better siding, etc.), but they do retain many of the "oil shack" attributes.

13. 720, 722, and 726 Wells Street--These three connected buildings have been associated with the central business area of Sistersville since the mid-1890s. That at 720 Wells Street now houses a jewelry store and is a two-story brick structure with flat metal roof. The facade is common, but it is somewhat distinguished by the row of stone near the tops of the second-floor windows and the corrugated design in the brick just below the roofline. The Morrison Building at 722 Wells was constructed in 1897 and is also a two-story brick structure with flat roof. It is a bit more elaborate than the unit at 720 Wells, for its facade contains a three-sided projection on the second level and diamond designs in two colors of brick as decoration between floors and above the bay window. The brickwork of the front--which extends well above the roofline--includes some interesting work in brick and a high cap in the center of the top. The First Federal Building at 726 Wells Street is a three-story stone and brick structure dating from 1896. The first floor is faced in stone and carries through typical arches of Richardsonian architecture on the front and the first window at the Charles Street side. All windows on the third level also have a curved arch, while those on the second floor are flat. The roofline is decorated with sunken brick panels and raised brick elements at the corners. Each of these buildings has undergone minor changes in the fronting windows and doors, but they are basically as when constructed.

14. Farmers and Producers Bank Building (600 block of Wells Street)--Bank buildings were among the better structures of boom-town Sistersville, and this is no exception. It, too, is a three-story stone and brick edifice, having a curved corner entrance at Wells and Diamond. The stone facing on the first floor is highlighted by the many curved-arch windows which have a fan-shaped stained glass section under the arch. The flat roof is detailed with a paneled-brick cap extending above the third floor and outlined by a course of stone at its base.

15. Henderson Hotel (608 Wells Street)--Since construction in the 1890s, this three-story, frame building has served as a hotel. It has been remodeled on the exterior over the years (especially in the first-floor brick work and enlarged windows

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7. DESCRIPTION (continued)

on the front), but it retains the best of its frame elements in the second-and third-story porches and the high, false front above the roof. The porches are completely surrounded by a balustrade with supports which have detailed carpentry work in the brackets. The top is capped by a bracketed cornice, almost resembling a dentil molding in design. It has been described as a piece of "rivertown" architecture with its porches resembling galleries of river steamboats.

16. Thoenen Residence (600 Wells Street)--Another residence typical of the styles of the late nineteenth century, this structure was built about 1900. It is a two-story-plus-attic house of red brick with a porch extending from a projection on the Wells Street side to another at the Elizabeth Street side. It has the bays, fine windows and asymmetrical design of so many other turn-of-the-century area homes.

17. McCormick/Henderson Home (508 Wells Street)--This house was built around 1880-84 as a simple, two-story frame residence in a "T" shape, with the leg of the "T" toward Wells Street. In 1895-96, with oil money providing the funds, the structure was remodeled to its present form. Among its better features are the gabled roofs with returned cornice, the three-sided bay on both floors of the front, the high brick chimneys and the elaborate carpentry designs of the porch which faces the street and extends to the cross of the "T" on the north. The latter has turned balusters and supporting columns with a projecting, pedimented section in the center of the front. There is also a line of balusters along the top edge and small brackets under the cornice. Added detail is in the pilaster effect at the edges of the second-floor facade.

18. Magnolia Manor Nursing Home (410 Wells Street)--Constructed in the 1890s, this house has many elements of Richardsonian architecture combined with features of other styles popular during the day. A two-story, frame structure, it is distinguished by a steep roof with gables on north and south elevations. On the front (east), one corner is dominated by a three-story octagonal tower with high roof, and the other end features a three-sided bay. The first floor has horizontal clapboards, while the second level (and third floor of the tower) has a scalloped-shingle siding. Two high brick chimneys dominate the roof, which in itself is stylish with various-shaped shingles and an ornamented ridge. Between the tower and the bay is a front porch whose roof is supported by columns. The cornice between first and second floors is detailed with a dentil molding, and this also appears under the striking bracketing at the rooflines of both the second floor and tower. Adding distinction is a Palladian window in the north gable and stained-glass transoms in the large windows of the bay. Little has changed on the exterior since construction, but the flared-brick chimney caps have been removed and a cast-iron rail has replaced a wooden balustrade on the roof of the front porch.

19. Hennaghan-Daly Block (721-27 Wells Street)--Typical of a small town, turn-of-

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7. DESCRIPTION (continued)

the-century business block, the two-story, brick and sandstone Hennaghan-Daly Block was constructed in 1896. Although there have been several changes of the first-floor store areas (plate glass windows, paneling, reworking of the brick), the fabric of the structure remains intact, and the second story is little changed (except for the removal of the conical cap over the corner bay). Among its outstanding features are the decorative capitals on the first-story columns, the bracketed cornice between first and second levels, the second-floor porch in the center of the Wells Street side with its cast-iron railing, the bay projecting from the corner of the second level, and heavy brackets on the cornice below the ornamental cap which is above the roofline.

20. Union National Bank Building (629 Wells Street)--Completed in 1902, this three-story stone structure has been used for banking purposes since its beginning and is another evidence of the effect of oil wealth in the Sistersville community. The exterior has carved sections between second and third levels done in a classical style by an unknown artist; the panel over the corner entrance displays the face of a human, and tradition claims it is that of a local Negro man who was instrumental in the building's construction and care. One of the interesting features are the Ionic pilasters placed on either side of the entrance doors and repeated from the stone course between first and second floors to the bracketed cornice above the third story. Third-level windows have the Richardsonian round arch set in rock-face masonry, but the openings on the other floors have flat lintels. As with so many rather level-roofed business buildings, this has a decorated cap above the third-story cornice.

21. 605 Wells Street--This is a two-story business/residential building on the edge of what has always been the central commercial area of the town. Although constructed in the early 1890s with features of Gothic architecture and fine carpentry details, the first-floor facing on Wells Street has recently (about 1960) been changed somewhat to include large windows with lattice frames and gaslights. The gabled house has a typically high false front with bracketed cornice projecting above the roof's ridge. The second-floor windows on the facade have pointed wooden arches with scrollwork, and there is a porch on this level which extends over the sidewalk.

22. 315 Wells Street--Many of Sistersville's residences were constructed just after the oil boom began in the early 1890s, and they express styles common to the day as interpreted by builders who came into the area as part of the growth. The house at 315 Wells Street, constructed in the mid-1890s, displays loosely interpreted Gothic lines in a simple, two-story frame residence. Its several gables each have large bracket supports and decorative gingerbread, and under each are one or two pointed-arch windows.



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7. DESCRIPTION (continued)

23. St. Paul's Episcopal Church (313 Wells Street)--It seems that the house at 315 Wells, as well as others throughout the town, may have taken some of the Gothic expression from this charming carpenter's rendition of about 1885. The frame structure consists of an entrance facing the street, a nave running perpendicular to the entrance and the sanctuary section on its north side, and an attached parish hall which has a gabled roof facing the same direction as sanctuary and entrance. Except for the parish house, all roofs are of high pitch. Steep gables of the entrance and sanctuary are bracketed and most windows and doors have pointed-arch windows (some of multiple sections). The bell tower on the entrance has a four-sided cap with louvered, pointed dormers on each side.

24. Wells Inn (316 Charles Street)--This 1894 hotel is one of the finer brick buildings in Sistersville. The main part is a three-story unit extending about 200 feet from its Charles Street front. To the Chelsea Street side is an attached, two-story brick unit which has served various purposes, mostly as residence and business offices. The facade of the three-story hotel has projecting segments to each side of the central area which features a one-story portico supported by four columns. All windows have stone lintels, and the cornice features corbeled brick designs. The two-story section has a gabled roof facing Charles Street, and on the gable is placed a Palladian window. A two-story, cylindrical tower with conical cap and detailed brick ornamentation graces the corner. In the indentation created between the tower and the projection of the three-story hotel is placed a wooden attachment with open porch on the first floor and enclosed area on the second. This has dentil molding in the cornice of both levels.

25. Hinerman Brothers Clothing Store (320 Diamond Street)--This is a simple, two-story frame business structure which predates the oil-boom days. Among the features of interest in the 1880s building are the typical high front above the roofline and the fact that it has operated as a department store under only two ownerships since 1892.

26. Sistersville Fire Department Building (Diamond Street)--Constructed about 1900 for use as a saloon, this two-story brick building has housed the city's fire department since 1914. Although not especially distinguished in design, the structure holds a prominent place in the community, for it is indicative of the significance of the saloon in a boom town and the change in construction as money allowed for more sturdy brick buildings in place of the flimsy frames hastily put up in the early 1890s.

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7. DESCRIPTION (continued)

27. 716 Main Street--Constructed in 1894, this yellow-brick house is intriguing in its workmanship and ornate qualities. It is two-and-one-half-stories high with a steep roof and projecting bay on its north side. Steps in brick are at most cornices; this is complemented along several sections by large brackets and a dentil-type molding. The front features an oval stained-glass window on the second floor and a Palladian window on the gable. The shingled bay has a semi-circular stained-glass window on its upper level.

Among other notable early and oil-boom period houses are those at 215 Charles Street, 718 Chelsea Street and that on the southeast corner of Wells and Charles Streets. Oil-boom commercial buildings may also be found at 614, 617, 619, 621-23, 625 and 711 Wells Street. The only federally owned building in the district is the U.S. Post Office at 521 Wells Street; it was built in 1934.

Of the more than two hundred buildings included within district boundaries, only about thirty should be considered intrusions in the sense of not dating from the primary period of significance (1890-1915), not following general architectural styles within the district or not being constructed of materials in keeping with district patterns. Most intrusions are recent cinder block garages, newer brick and frame residences and mobile homes.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Sistersville, in Tyler County, West Virginia, has gone through roughly three stages in its evolution from small, agricultural river town through oil-boom city and finally to a quiet community still showing the effects of oil wealth. One of its main attributes is that it remains relatively unspoiled by a type of deterioration which sometimes follows rapid economic development based on a mineral which significantly and quickly "dries up" from its major proportions. The Ohio River has always had a great influence on the town, but it is often overlooked when one concentrates on the expansion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This point of reference has again come to mark the fairly even pace of life in an area which "got rich quick" and then had the good fortune to see much of the wealth translated into handsome and strong buildings which impart the "flavor" of turn-of-the-century America.

Sistersville is a small town situated along the Ohio River between Wheeling and Parkersburg, West Virginia. The river has proven to be the most valuable natural resource of the town, but the agricultural and oil phases of its development have often submerged this importance. There was only a scattering of settlers between Wheeling and Marietta (Ohio) in the latter part of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries, yet the area was inviting. Several families were drawn to the neighborhood of present Sistersville and to lands along Middle Island Creek near present Middlebourne around 1800. As more came to populate the region, it was thought reasonable to divide jurisdictions, and in 1814 Tyler County (in which both Sistersville and Middlebourne are located) was established from part of Ohio County, Virginia.

The exact year of the migration of Charles Wells, the first settler of note to make a home near the site of Sistersville, is not definitely known, but he probably came in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Wells was an unusual man of outstanding ability who represented northwestern Virginia in that state's legislature for eight years between 1789 and 1810. After he left Wellsburg (north of Wheeling) on a flatboat which carried his family and possessions, he floated down the Ohio until he reached land just south of Sistersville and there built a log house. Such was the beginning of a community which would remain small and struggling until the early 1890s.

Soon after Wells had erected his dwelling, one Robert Grier rented a room and began some sort of trading establishment. Then William and Joshua Russell arrived and set up shop. James Jolly started a tanyard on what became "Tanyard Run" (the small stream which now flows through the city's park). Henry Jolly ran a ferry boat across the Ohio River; Robert Grier operated a carding machine and thread wheel; Thomas Gregg ran a grist and saw mill. "Wells Landing" or "Ziggletown" (as it was once called for unknown reasons) became a center of organized living.

The town continued to grow and remain active. People would travel from the surrounding region to use the mills or carding equipment. Here the farmers and woodsmen could barter their products for the articles which they needed to make life more comfortable.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

Here one could have hides tanned or goods shipped. The town was located on an exceptionally long and deep pool in the river, and the ferry could operate in all seasons. Here was also an excellent, gravelly beach which aided the landing of boats and enabled the community to be opened to the commerce of the "west" whose lifeline was then the Ohio River.

In 1815 the Wells sisters, Sarah and Delilah Wells Grier, daughters of Charles, laid out a town on land which they had inherited from their father. These are the sisters for whom Sistersville is named. The original plan located ninety-six lots along four streets running parallel to and four running perpendicular to the river. The former were named (in order from the river) Water (now Riverside Drive), Main, Wells and Brown Betty (now Chelsea), and the latter were called (from south to north) Catherine, Diamond, Elizabeth and Hill. Virginia Street was later added to the northern end of town.

It was hoped that Sistersville would become the county seat, and a diamond-shaped plat at the intersection of Main and Diamond Streets (presently the location of City Hall) was set aside for courthouse, jail, whipping post and lawyers' office. At the first county court held in 1815, contracts were partially negotiated for the building of the courthouse and jail, but in 1816 Middlebourne, an interior town, was awarded the distinction of becoming the county's official headquarters.

The first deed for a lot in the new community was made between Sarah Wells and William and Joshua Russell on July 1, 1816, and this was situated at Water and Catherine Streets at the river bank (the lot which today is the site of the Catherine Street oil derrick). The Russells purchased other property in this vicinity, and it is believed that the red brick building still standing along Catherine Street (the Russell/Daily Oil Review Building) was constructed by the brothers around 1832 as a store and residence. Only a few houses were in the area until the second half of the nineteenth century; most of the towns lots were cultivated.

It was about the time of the building of the Ohio River Railroad (now part of the Baltimore and Ohio) through Sistersville in 1884, that the region perceptibly changed, for this opened a new and faster means of travel and transportation between Parkersburg and Wheeling. Freight and passenger stations were constructed, and by 1888 the county was pictured as a strong and expanding economic unit based on agriculture.

Philo W. Stocking appears to have been the first oil speculator in the Sistersville area. He moved here in 1841, and for many years he was engaged in the operation of a large flour mill (Riverside Mill) on Water Street. Since Stocking always believed there was oil under the lands he bought, he was very careful to reserve the mineral rights for himself and his heirs. He tried several secret drillings shortly after the Civil War but was not fortunate enough to have found his objective.

Another speculator was a second Joshua Russell. In July 1890 he drilled on his farm about a mile and a half north of town on Pole Cat Run, but great quantities of inflowing salt water caused temporary abandonment until a new method was developed to siphon off the water cap. Finally, after about a year of pumping, the oil came in;

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Sistersville would change rapidly.

With the opening of the Sistersville Field in early 1892, unusually quick development followed, producing what only can be called a boom. Daily average production of oil was at 300 barrels on February 27, 1,800 barrels on March 28, 4,300 on June 23, and 16,543 by October 17 with 164 completed wells, 55 drilling stages and 29 new locations. By the end of the year production was up to 20,500 barrels per day at the average price of 55½¢ per barrel during 1892.

As with early development elsewhere, "wildcatting" was prevalent in Sistersville. Consolidation soon began, however, through the efforts of such men as John L. Carter and J.C. Tennant. Others followed and comparatively large operations started. "Oil fever" took hold on the community.

The boom changed values, social as well as economic. Soon the small town faced overwhelming expansion, and stratification according to material standards set in. Population increased from less than 600 in 1888 to over 7,000 in 1898. Most came in from the older fields of Pennsylvania and Ohio as tank builders, mechanics, drillers, leasing scouts and clerical specialists.

A feeling of suspicion and mistrust for each wave of newcomers was experienced by those who saw the town filling with opportunists and "camp followers." Along with those who had a direct connection with the oil field came others whose desire it was to exploit. Saloon keeps set up their newly constructed establishments beside existing hotels and housing additions; gambling rooms appeared; "Houseboat," "Sleepy Hollow" and Happy Hollow" madams added to the boom atmosphere. Local newspapers gave vivid accounts, the Cincinnati Enquirer ranked Sistersville as one of the wickedest towns of the time, and an account of 1936 pictured the turn-of-the-century city in this way:

Houses were even torn down to make room for a drilling derrick. Shacks and tents were thrown together to help house the people; houseboats lined the river banks on both sides of a mile or more up and down the river--moored so closely that one could walk by stepping from one to the other without going ashore--and helping to feed and sleep the people and at the same time furnishing liquor, amusement and entertainment of every kind to suit the taste of those seeking it for nearly every houseboat was a speak-easy, gambling room or worse. Saloons, gambling houses and theaters sprang up over night. . . One popular saloon was burned down during the night during the Hey-Day and early the following morning before the ruins had cooled and ceased smoking the erection of another building on the site commenced. The gambling rooms existed as an aftermath until 1912.

The impact of wealth had a great influence on the lives of many in the community. As an example, some farmers were now getting as much as \$3,000 a day from an acre of land on which a good well was producing. With this income, even for a few years, many were able to move to town, invest in the shares of new banks and become prosperous businessmen. Town merchants generally profited and used new capital to enlarge establishments or start a new boarding house or restaurant.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

Henry R. Brilles came from Wheeling to open a clothing store; L.E. Hubbard, from Sherman, New York, began a meat market; M.A. Sybert of Pennsylvania kept a grocery store; Eurie F. Randolph, from Salem, West Virginia, had a shoe store; H.C. Williamson of Muse's Bottom, West Virginia, served as a photographer. Thompson and Work constructed the Opera House in 1894. John Matthews was a teamster, C.C. Marsh a jeweler, and R.G. Caldwell built the Arlington Hotel (today's Henderson Hotel).

The first bank (Tyler County Bank) was granted a charter in November 1892. It started in a frame building on the corner of Wells and Diamond Streets. In 1895 the First National and Farmers and Producers banks opened. The Union National Bank was a consolidation of the Peoples National and Farmers and Producers and the First National merged with Tyler County Bank to become the First Tyler Bank and Trust Company.

The housing problem created by the rush of workmen into the town led to most private homes taking in boarders. Rents went from a dollar to as high as ten dollars per week. Those who were looking for rooms often bided against each other, and many rooms were rented out in shifts. After these were taken, sheds, barns and empty buildings were used as rough lodgings. Hastily built shanty boats made from scraps of lumber became suburbs along with the tent cities. Other areas of growth sprang up with "oil shacks," creating such sections as "Old Rough and Ready," "Gary Owen," "Coney Island," "Cow House" and "Happy Hollow." Quickly built boarding houses were constructed to meet the demand. Enterprising, hard working women prepared meals for fifty to seventy-five men a day. Among the larger hotels were the well-known Arlington and Wells, the latter considered the most elaborate in the area.

Fine homes were built, most of them along Main Street, for the newly-rich oil and professional men who came to the city. Many of these were in the Richardsonian, Gothic Revival, Queen Anne and eclectic styles popular in the 1890s, with much attention given to trim and decoration. William B. O'Neil, architect and contractor, and John J. Rea, stone mason and contractor, both of Ohio, came to the area to do much of the work. Among the structures attributed to them are the Wells Hotel, Main Street School and several residences. The new City Building on the diamond at Main and Diamond Streets was constructed in 1897. The building not only housed the city offices, but the top floor was used for conventions and social gatherings.

From the beginning, the church had been firmly established as an important part of the community. The Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists and Episcopalians were well organized at the time of the oil excitement, but church buildings were in desperate need of repair or replacement. Sincere men made liberal donations of both land and money to improve the churches. A new Baptist edifice was dedicated August 17, 1895; Catholic Church membership grew rapidly with the influx of people, and a structure was completed in 1893. The social fairs, bazaars, ladies' suppers, Sunday school and church picnics, benefit plays and musicals, and Sunday morning and Wednesday evening prayer meetings were an essential part of community activity.

Schools soon felt the problems of overcrowding in the city. Enrollment was so large that in some primary rooms as many as one hundred pupils were assigned to one

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

teacher. After much urging from the local newspapers and public spirited citizens, better schools came to Sistersville, and a new high school building was finished in 1897.

The clearest pictures and descriptions of the life of the oil boom are found in the local newspapers. Sistersville had two papers which influenced the community: the Tyler County Star News of Middlebourne, founded in 1877, and the Tyler Democrat of Sistersville, which later became an oil trade journal and changed its name to the West Virginia Daily (and Weekly) Oil Review. These were boosters of the town, but they also discussed morals, manners, individual conduct, the local agents of Standard Oil, school issues and laxity on the part of town officials in editorial comment. When the Standard Oil Company was formed in the area in the 1890s, the efforts of the Daily Oil Review were directed against it.

At times people were not working they engaged in the social pleasures of the "Gay Nineties." Before oil, the village was not without social life or entertainment, of course, as the railroad was a path for the circuses of John Robinson and others and the river brought showboats and many traveling musicians. Activities increased many-fold, however, with the growth from the oil excitement. There were parties, church gatherings, wedding celebrations, dances and picnics. Holidays were celebrated in grand style, and on some occasions money was contributed by the City Council to help insure success. There were private social clubs like the Americus, the Virginians and the Sistersville Mandolin and Guitar Society. The Negro population had an Orange Blossom Club which staged cakewalks and balls in the town's auditorium. Those of the community who were musically inclined created bands, orchestras and music clubs, and ladies and gentlemen formed the Sistersville Music and Literary Club which sponsored "refined classical music."

The town could boast of three theaters at one time: The Auditorium, built by Henry McCoy in 1896, Olsen's Opera House and the Columbia. Over the years people saw more legitimate stage productions than would be offered in many larger communities. The Auditorium, with five hundred first-floor seats, three hundred first-balcony seats and about two hundred "peanut-heaven" seats, offered a versatile bill. The Columbia featured a different type of amusement, including vaudeville performers, character comedians, Dutch comedians and loop-walking artists. At the Comique, a nightclub, Ben Turpin gained experience, and the "Harem Houses of Salus" had a long run.

Volunteer fire departments in Sistersville contributed much to the social life of the community, but they were more important in the service they were intended to give. Disastrous fires in the hastily built sections of the town occurred frequently, and because of the dangers of the oil business the skill and knowledge of a good fire department was essential. Oil operators, along with the municipal government, donated funds for fire-fighting equipment and club rooms.

In 1912 a Civic League of prominent citizens was formed to rid Sistersville of its "vice and corruption, its surville city officials and its dissolute political

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

dictator." James Hennaghan and his nephew, Ed Hanlon, who illegally obtained licenses for their saloons (The Big Store and the Hotel Wells Saloon) were in control of the city's activities. Among the accusations of the local people:

Every year the spring election reeked corruption. Votes were openly bought, booze was freely used, and gamblers and bar tenders of Henneghan's place were the election officials and ward heelers.

With the display of much strong feeling and action by a supposedly "packed" grand jury, Hennaghan and his friends of the City Council resigned, and the entire list on the Citizens ticket was installed soon after the spring election. Hennaghan and Hanlon left town, later to return as reputable oil business executives. Misdemeanors continued, but this was the last great scandal in city government.

The newspapers and local business organizations soon began urging the public to plan for the days when the oil would be depleted. They wanted the town to establish local industries while money and labor were in the area. This resulted in a few small industries, such as several glass plants using available natural gas, but not enough was done to halt population and payroll decline.

Today, Sistersville is a quiet little residential town with a population of about 2300, but its downtown area is essentially what was produced during the oil-boom days of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the outgrowth and consolidation of mineral wealth applied to three-dimensional manifestations.



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10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 45 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,7	50,002,0	4,37,92,8,0	B	1,7	50,05,1,0	4,37,96,0,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
c	1,7	50,06,9,0	4,37,93,0,0	d	1,7	50,02,0,0	4,37,89,8,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The north side of Catherine Street from the ferry landing at the Ohio River to Alley "C" between Wells and Chelsea Streets, thence north on Alley "C" to the rear of Wells Inn, thence east to the west side of Chelsea Street. North on Chelsea Street to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad tracks at Elizabeth Street, northwest along the tracks to Hill Street, then north beyond St. Paul's Episcopal Church. From St. Paul's west to the Ohio River to include all buildings facing Virginia Street on its north. Along the Ohio River from Virginia Street to the ferry landing site at the foot of Catherine Street. LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE	DATE
James E. Harding, Research Analyst	April 25, 1975
ORGANIZATION	TELEPHONE
West Virginia Antiquities Commission	(304) 292-1527
STREET & NUMBER	STATE
Old Mountainlair, West Virginia University	West Virginia
CITY OR TOWN	
Morgantown	

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 National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

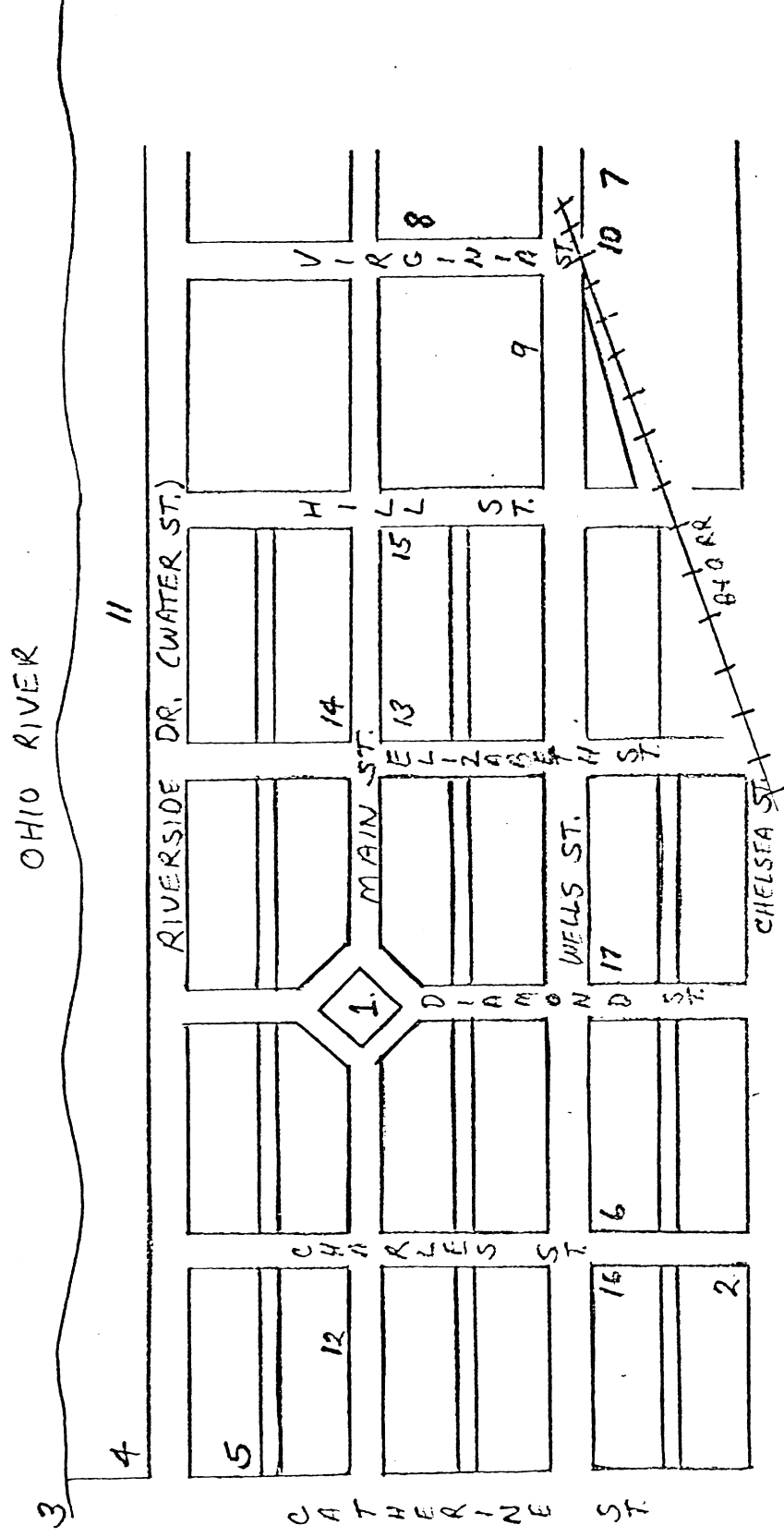
Leonard M. Davis

TITLE West Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer DATE July 3, 1975

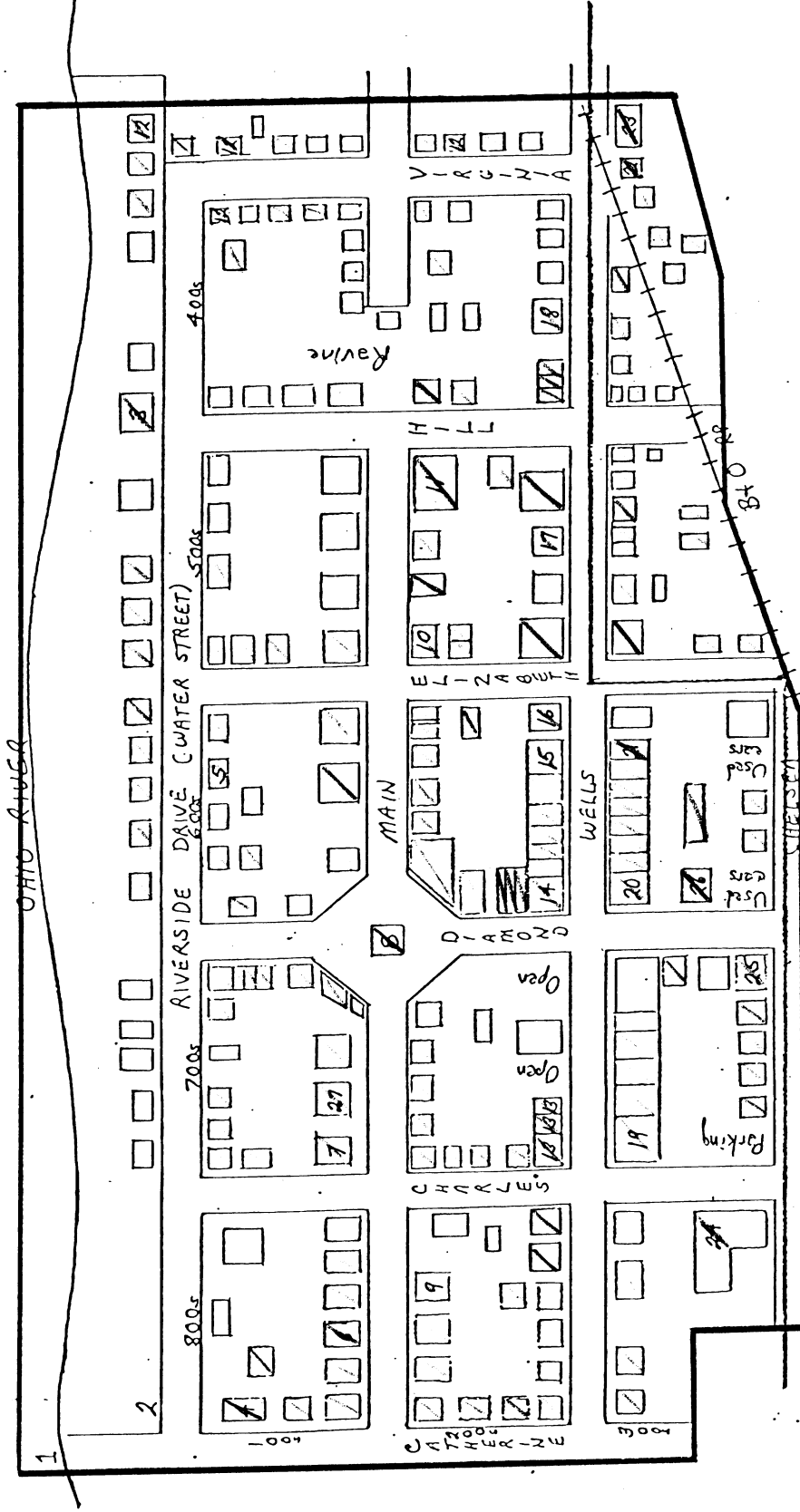
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
	DATE
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE
ATTEST:	DATE
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

# SISTERSVILLE, WEST VIRGINIA

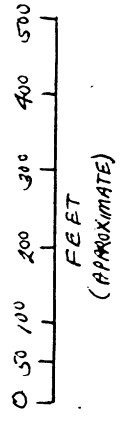
1. City Building
2. Wells Inn
3. Ferry Landing
4. Catherine St. Oil Derrick
5. Russell-Daily Oil Review Building
6. Hennaghan-Daly Block
7. St. Paul's Episcopal Church
8. Virginia Street "Oil Shacks"
9. Magnolia Manor Nursing Home
10. 315 Wells Street
11. Riverside Mill
12. McKay-Miller Residence
13. 519 Main Street
14. 518 Main Street
15. Main Street School
16. McCormick-Henderson House



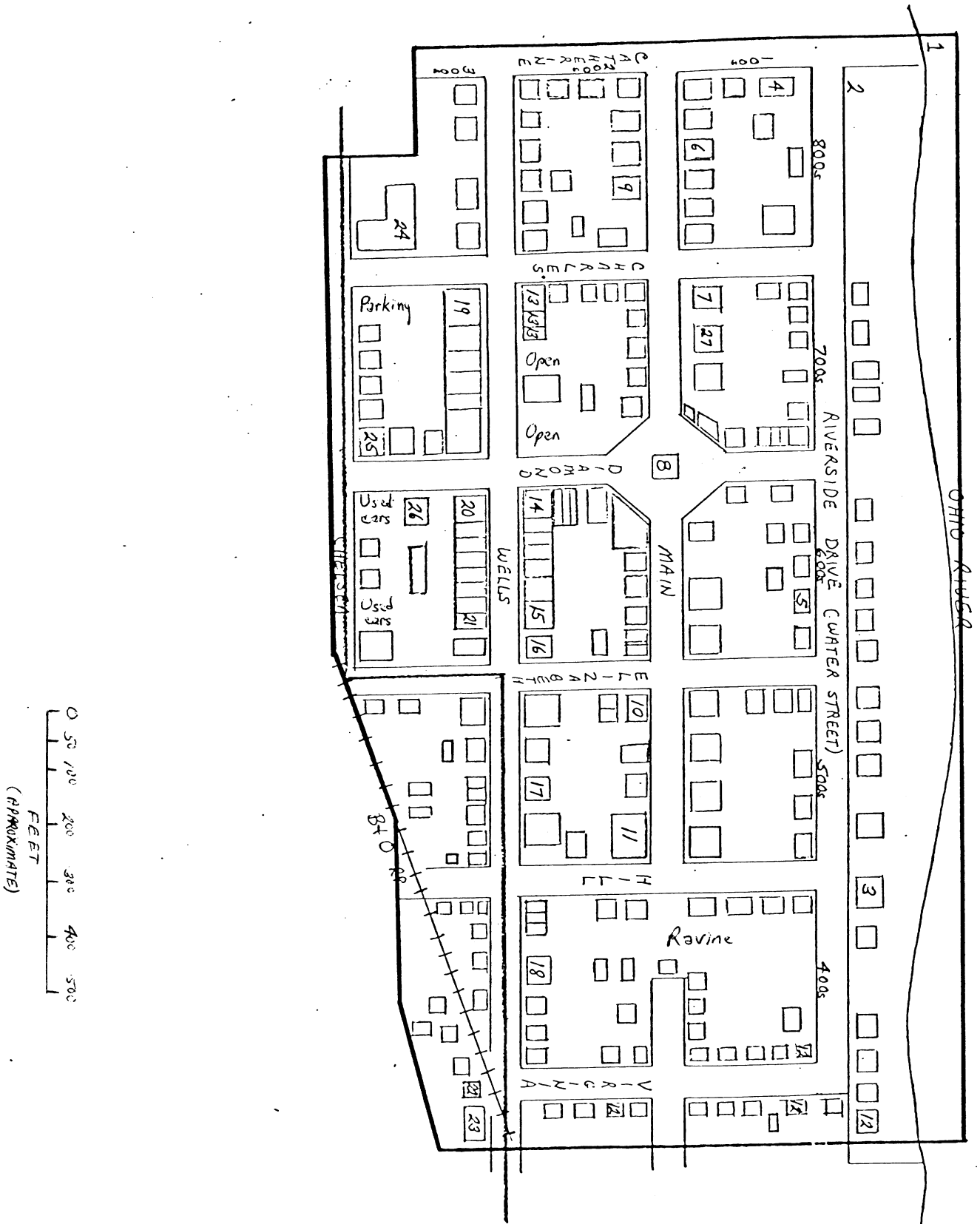
SISTERSVILLE, TYLER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA



- District boundary
- - - West Virginia Route 2
- ... Intrusions
- Residential in keeping with the district
- Commercial in keeping with the district
- Civic (government, churches, library, etc.) in keeping with the district



SISTERSVILLE, TYLER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA



SISTERSVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT  
TYLER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

PIVOTAL STRUCTURES

1. Ferry Landing Site (Catherine Street at the Ohio River)
2. Catherine Street Oil Derrick (Riverside Drive and Catherine Street)
3. Riverside Mill (Riverside Drive near the foot of Hill Street)
4. Russell/Daily Oil Review Building (107 Catherine Street)
5. 605 Riverside Drive
6. McKay/Miller Residence (816 Main Street)
7. Graham Residence (718 Main Street)
8. City Building (on the Diamond)
9. Wells House (809 Main Street)
10. 519 Main Street
11. Main Street School (501 Main Street)
12. Virginia Street "Oil Shacks"
13. 720, 722 and 726 Wells Street
14. Farmers and Producers Bank Building (600 block of Wells Street)
15. Henderson Hotel (608 Wells Street)
16. Thoenen Residence (600 Wells Street)
17. McCormick/Henderson Home (508 Wells Street)
18. Magnolia Manor Nursing Home (410 Wells Street)
19. Hennaghan-Daly Block (721-27 Wells Street)
20. Union National Bank Building (629 Wells Street)
21. 605 Wells Street
22. 315 Wells Street
23. St. Paul's Episcopal Church (313 Wells Street)
24. Wells Inn (316 Charles Street)
25. Hinerman Brothers Clothing Store (320 Diamond Street)
26. Sistersville Fire Department Building (Diamond Street)
27. 716 Main Street

SISTERSVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT  
TYLER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

PIVOTAL STRUCTURES

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PROPERTY MAP FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH MAP

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON Sistersville Historic District

**2 LOCATION**

CITY, TOWN

Sistersville

VICINITY OF

COUNTY

Tyler

STATE

West Virginia

**3 MAP REFERENCE**

SOURCE W.Va. Antiquities Commission, P.O. Box 937, Morgantown, West Virginia

SCALE 1" = 250' (approximate) DATE 1975

**4 REQUIREMENTS**

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS

1. PROPERTY BOUNDARIES
2. NORTH ARROW
3. UTM REFERENCES

INT: 3464-75

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Old Mountainlair, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia.



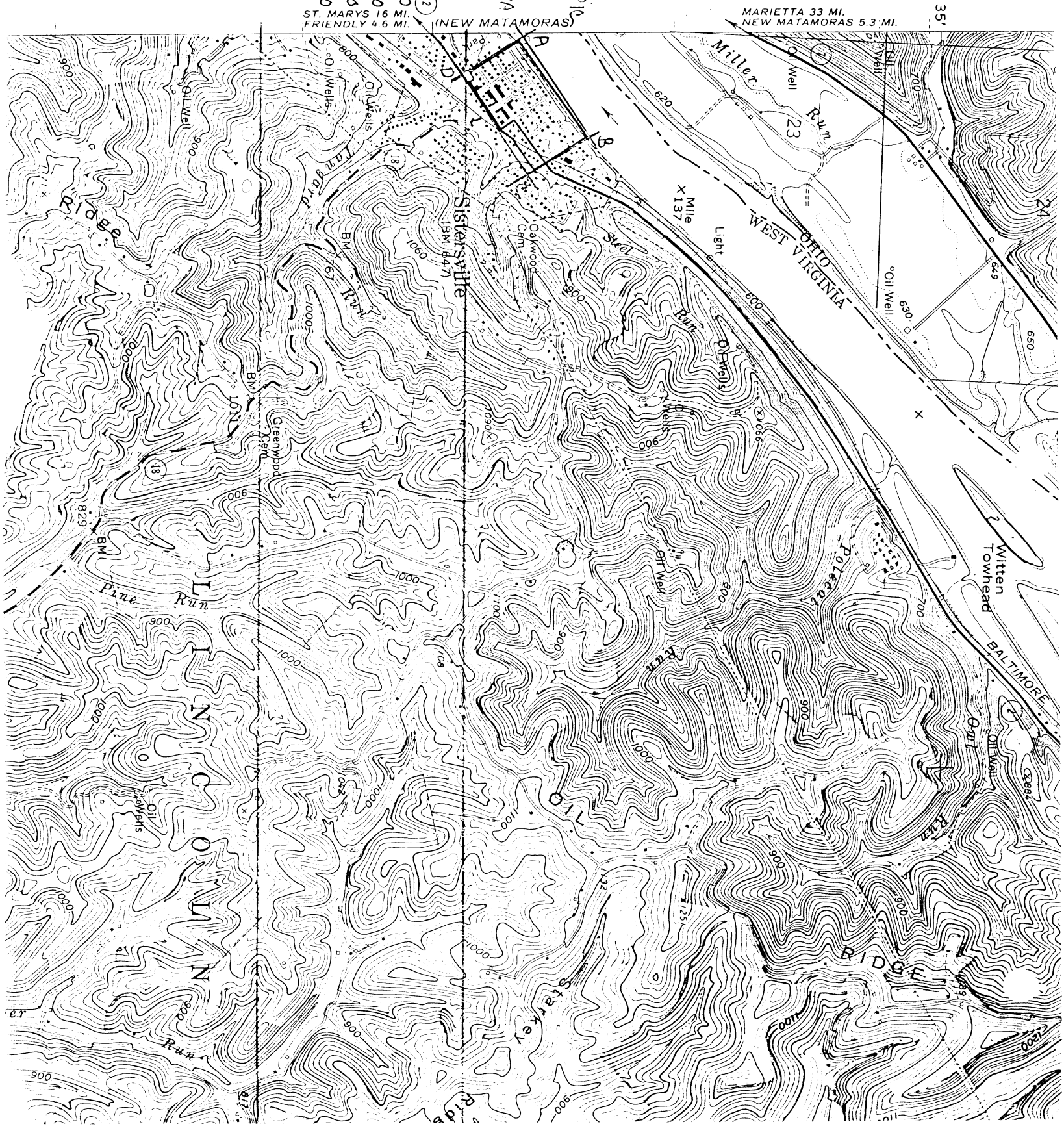
SISTERSVILLE HISTORIC  
DISTRICT  
SISTERSVILLE, TYLER  
COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA  
(DISTRICT BOUNDARIES  
IN RED)

UTM 1000 PINNALS: ②

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C 17/500690/4379200  
D 17/500200/4378780

ST. MARYS 16 MI.  
FRIENDLY 4.6 MI.

MARIETTA 33 MI.  
NEW MATAMORAS 5.3 MI.







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WESTERN  
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