NHL Nomination Letter of Support
Keim Homestead, Berks County, PA
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This nomination proposes NHL status for two buildings at the Keim Homestead, both dating from about 1753: the house and associated ancillary building. They are being nominated for exceptional architectural significance, specifically as representatives of early German-American architectural practices. I am glad to provide a letter of support for this nomination.

The well documented nomination presents a persuasive case for the property's national significance. First I will focus on the lengthy list of documented architectural features that appears on pages 28-29. Most of these features are still intact, or evidence for them is clear. The Keim house and its ancillary building possess a remarkable and integrated constellation of characteristics that together express colonial-period German-American architectural culture extremely well. The house floor plan, for example, is laid out in the asymmetrical three-room plan so often found in German speaking places during the colonial and early national period. Indeed, this plan persisted in isolated spots all the way into the twentieth century. Its spatial volumes—especially the stove room -- seem to have possessed deep social and cultural significance over a long period. Another architectural element with social importance for German-Americans is the c. 1815 addition to the house that evidently was given over to the parents, thus embodying a longstanding cultural custom of multigenerational residence. The topographical relationship of the two buildings forms another aspect of the overall site's significance.

German-American domestic buildings also typically incorporated key productive spaces such as insulated cellar rooms, attic grain storage, and cellar water channels, all of which appear at the Keim homestead. These spaces are significant because they represent types of food production and preservation spaces that were culturally specific. The ancillary, entirely given over to productive uses, epitomizes this tradition with its multi-function and multi-level organization of spaces for work from dairying to washing to heavy food preparation wood turning. The architectural survivals in this building are exceptional.

Multiple construction details add to the architectural significance. The way the building is framed, the elements exposed, the walls finished, the pent roof constructed, and stairways enclosed all appear in strong expression as German American architectural elements.

Decorative expressions also typify the German American colonial tradition. Heavy wood trim, characteristic decorative ironwork, and brick window arches combine to create a remarkable aesthetic unity.

In total, the architectural complex at the Keim Homestead reaches the high threshold for NHL designation. The nomination successfully measures the Keim Homestead against properties that have already achieved NHL status. As well, following established scholarship, the nomination places the property within a broad interpretive context. In brief, the Keim homestead represents a fully developed set of architectural practices with roots in Europe, combined with modifications that evolved within the American experience. I use the term "American" deliberately, since German immigrants followed these practices throughout the colonies and in doing so they helped to create a diverse society and cultural landscape that came to diverge from English patterns in significant ways. As a highly intact illustration of this characteristic "Americanizing" process, the German American Keim Homestead achieves national significance.