

# CHELTENHAM'S HISTORIC DISTRICTS:

## An Owner's Manual for Properties in La Mott and Wyncote



View of the streetscape in the La Mott Historic District.

The goal of the *Owner's Manual* is to clarify the benefits and regulations surrounding historic properties in the La Mott and Wyncote Historic Districts. Historic properties are an asset to the community and require special consideration. This brochure outlines some items to consider if you are purchasing, renovating or selling a historic house in one of Cheltenham's historic districts.

Cheltenham's historic districts are an asset to the community, the county and the state at large. As a property owner in the districts, you are part of the effort to preserve these unique, beautiful communities for future generations.

### **Q: How do I know if I have a historic house?**

**A: All properties within the two designated historic districts are historic and are regulated by the Township.**

Cheltenham has two designated historic districts that are overseen by the Boards of Historical and Architectural Review (BHAR). If your house is within the boundaries of either the La Mott or Wyncote Historic District (see inset maps on page

four), your property is considered historic. Ownership of historic properties comes with benefits and legal regulations. If you plan to buy, sell, or renovate a property within these boundaries, you need to consider how the changes affect both your house and the historic district.

### **Q: What are the benefits to owning a historic house?**

**A: There are benefits to property value, environmental stability and investment stability specific to historic districts.**

- Your property's status as a historic house honors and respects the heritage of La Mott and Wyncote.
- Historic districts foster community pride.
- Your district designation will help preserve the character of your neighborhood for future generations.
- Historic districts can help protect your investment.
- In some cases, you may be eligible for tax breaks or grants for repairs.
- Historic districts promote community charm and help preserve local history.



View of the streetscape in the Wyncote Historic District.



**Q: When and how do I have to notify the Township about proposed changes to my property?**

**A: As soon as possible in the decision-making process.**

Any time you want to make changes to the *exterior* of your property—specifically those areas that are visible from any public right-of-way—you need to complete the “Board of Historical and Architectural Review Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) Application” (this document is available online and can be downloaded at <http://cheltenham.municipalcms.com/docview.aspx?docid=2708>). After completing the application, speak to the Township representatives in the Building and Zoning Office to ensure that your application is complete. Although not mandatory, it can be very helpful to approach the BHAR with your proposed project plans *before* submitting an application, especially for larger or more involved alterations. The earlier the BHAR is involved in your project, the smoother the application process will be.

Throughout the process, remember that the members of the BHARs and the Township officials are working with the same goals in mind: they want to help you to preserve your property and to maintain the character of the districts.

When completing your COA application, you will need to educate yourself on the ins and outs of historic buildings. Historic buildings are constructed to operate as a holistic system, so it is critical to understand the holistic system prior to implementing any changes.

When working with contractors or design professionals to plan alterations and to submit your COA application, be an educated consumer so you can be an advocate for your property. As a starting point, consider reading the National Park Service’s *Preservation Briefs* as they are applicable to your planned projects. Versions of the *Briefs* have been tailored to pertain to Cheltenham Township. A

summary of the types of projects, materials and resources can be found in the index at the end of this manual.

After your application for a COA is submitted and deemed complete, you will be scheduled for the next monthly meeting of your district’s BHAR, which you are required to attend to present your application. The BHAR meetings are scheduled monthly and the dates can be found on the Township’s website. The BHAR will review the application based on the National Park Service’s *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* ([www.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/)) and issue a recommendation to either table, approve or deny your application. The overarching goal of the BHAR process is to protect the overall character of Cheltenham’s historic districts. The BHAR reports to the Public Works Committee and the Board of Commissioners, who ultimately approve the COA application.

After you obtain your COA from the Township, it is valid for two years.

These guidelines were developed in conjunction with Cheltenham Township’s Boards of Historical and Architectural Review (BHAR). The BHARs review Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications for proposed exterior alterations that are visible from the public right-of-way within historic districts. The COA applicant is responsible for complying with the provisions of the Zoning and Building Codes at the time of application. The applicant must obtain a COA as well as all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. For more information, or to obtain permit applications, please call the COA Administrator at 215-887-6200, extension 213.

This brochure is intended only as a guide, is not regulatory in nature, and should not replace the guidance of a licensed professional architect or engineer. Although the information presented in this brochure is based on current knowledge and practices, Cheltenham Township and its historic preservation consultant, Cultural Heritage Research Services, Inc. (CHRS, Inc.), do not accept liability for any losses or damages resulting from its use.



View of a residential building in the Wyncote Historic District.



**Q: What considerations should be made when selling a house in a historic district?**

**A: Anyone selling a property within either historic district is required to disclose the historic designation of the property.**

If you plan to sell property in the La Mott or Wyncote Historic Districts, you need to ensure that your realtor understands the historic designation and includes that information when the property is listed for sale. By educating potential homeowners about the history of the districts, they will better understand the BHAR process and the significance of the properties.

**Q: Congratulations, you have obtained your COA! What should be your next steps?**

**A: Implement your project as you presented on your COA application.**

You should begin your construction project by soliciting bids from multiple contractors. It is best to employ architects and contractors who understand historic buildings and who will design and implement alterations that are in keeping with both the appearance and the physical features of the property.

Before hiring a contractor or architect to change your building, you may want to consider the following:

- Educate yourself so you are an informed customer.
- Solicit multiple bids from contractors who are knowledgeable about historic buildings.
- Ask pointed questions of your contractor regarding materials and methods. Make sure that the answers you receive correspond with any research you have undertaken.
- Request testimonials of past work from your contractor.
- If you are unsure of how to proceed with a repair, contact the Building and Zoning Department and/or your BHAR to ask for guidance.



Two views of Latham Parkway in the La Mott Historic District.

## The National Register Significance of the La Mott Historic District (Based on the National Register Nomination)

The village of La Mott, located in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, stands as an important landmark in American black history. As one of the first communities in the country to embrace integrated living, the village represents a turning point in the social and racial development of residential enclaves in the post-Civil War era. Including the site of Camp William Penn, the nation's first and largest federal training camp for United States Colored Troops (1863-1865), La Mott saw the participation of both blacks and whites in the development of this suburban residential community.

Much of the credit for the creation of this community is given to Lucretia Mott, noted Quaker abolitionist and suffragette, whose beliefs in racial harmony and equality were well-known to the proponents of the anti-slavery movement. While Mrs. Mott served as a spiritual leader, it was her son-in-law Edward M. Davis who was responsible for much of the physical development of the community. Davis, also a member of the Society of Friends, was a major landholder and real estate entrepreneur in Cheltenham Township. Shortly after the Civil War, Davis subdivided 30 acres of his land, cut streets and created small building lots available to both black and white purchasers. While the first purchasers were Irish immigrants, blacks soon began to acquire lots and build houses. From these early beginnings the village of La Mott was born. Integration within a residential setting, even in the more enlightened northern industrial cities, was virtually unheard of in the nineteenth century, making Davis' willingness to provide blacks and whites with an equal opportunity to purchase land progressive and enlightened in its foundations.

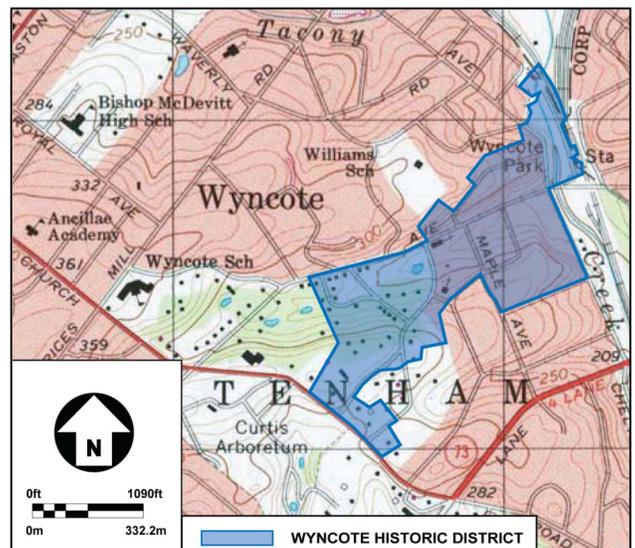
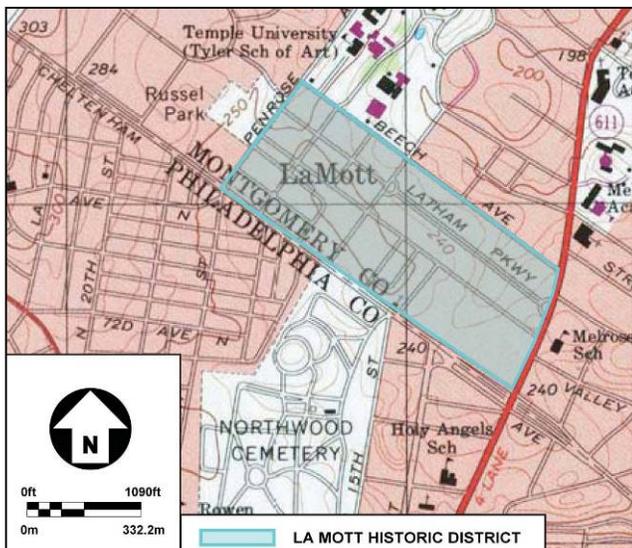
Named in honor of one of the community's most influential proponents, the village of La Mott has created a rich heritage and standard for living which continues today.

The complete National Register Nomination is available on Pennsylvania's online database: [crgis.state.pa.us/](http://crgis.state.pa.us/)

## The National Register Significance of the Wyncote Historic District (Quoted from the National Register Nomination)

The Wyncote Historic District is significant as an example of a wealthy, turn-of-the-century, Philadelphia suburb. Developed by several individuals, Wyncote was settled primarily by businessmen and professionals who found new wealth in Philadelphia's burgeoning economy. These developers and residents ensured that Wyncote remained an exclusive suburb through the use of deed requirements for minimum building costs and lot sizes and through the formation of the Wyncote Improvement Association. These wealthy people created a collection of houses that are excellent examples of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architectural styles. In addition, many of the houses in this district were designed by prominent Philadelphia architects.

The complete National Register Nomination is available on Pennsylvania's online database: [crgis.state.pa.us/](http://crgis.state.pa.us/)





***Index of Organizations That May Be of Assistance to Homeowners:***

- The **Cheltenham Township Building and Zoning Office** will assist property owners in completing the application for a COA and will answer general questions on the permitting and BHAR processes.  
[www.cheltenhamtownship.org/](http://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/)
- The **Old York Road Historical Society** is a repository for local history. If you want to begin researching the history of your property, the OYRHS should be your first stop.  
[www.oyrhs.org/](http://www.oyrhs.org/)
- The **Cheltenham Township Historical Commission** is an excellent resource for property owners. The Commission will assist homeowners with questions for researching properties, appropriate repairs and how to navigate the BHAR process.  
[www.cheltenhamtownship.org/](http://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/)
- The **Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia** is a regional advocacy group that offers directories for contractors, preservation research and publications, information regarding advocacy issues, and preservation events throughout the area. In addition, they host a series of “Homeowner Workshops” and the “Old House Fair,” which focus on the concerns of homeowners.  
[www.preservationalliance.com/](http://www.preservationalliance.com/)
- The **Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission** has a Community Preservation Program that offers technical assistance, advice, and educational programs to municipalities and preservation organizations to develop preservation plans, establish local historic district ordinances, investigate alternatives for preserving key buildings, and explore strategies for promoting heritage tourism and commercial and neighborhood revitalization.  
[www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/community\\_preservation/3770](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/community_preservation/3770)

- The **National Park Service Technical Preservation Services** has a wealth of information, including a series of *Preservation Briefs* that discuss topics in preservation, information on federal tax credits, opportunities for education, and *The Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*.  
[www.nps.gov/tps/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/tps/index.htm)
- **National Trust for Historic Preservation** is a nation-wide advocacy group that offers education and leadership for the preservation of the built environment.  
[www.preservationnation.org/](http://www.preservationnation.org/)
- The **Richard Wall House Museum** is a repository for local history. If you want to research the archives in the library, access is by appointment only by calling 215-877-9159.  
[www.cheltenhamtownship.org/pView.aspx?id=3593&catid=26](http://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/pView.aspx?id=3593&catid=26)

This document was initiated and overseen by Cheltenham Township and made possible through a grant provided by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Please contact the Township to see if your project requires a permit. Please call the COA Administrator at 215-887-6200, extension 213.

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This program receives federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in federally assisted programs. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240, or visit [www.doi.gov/diversity/civil\\_rights.html](http://www.doi.gov/diversity/civil_rights.html).

CHRS, Inc., of Lansdale, Pennsylvania prepared this publication.

## ***Index of Educational Resources for Homeowners:***

- **Masonry**

If you are hiring a mason to complete pointing on your building, read *Preservation Brief 2: Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Masonry Buildings* ([www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief02.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief02.htm)) and Cheltenham Township's *Guidelines for Masonry* ([www.cheltenhamtownship.org/documents.aspx](http://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/documents.aspx)), so you can ask informed questions and understand the types of materials that are appropriate for your building.

- **Windows**

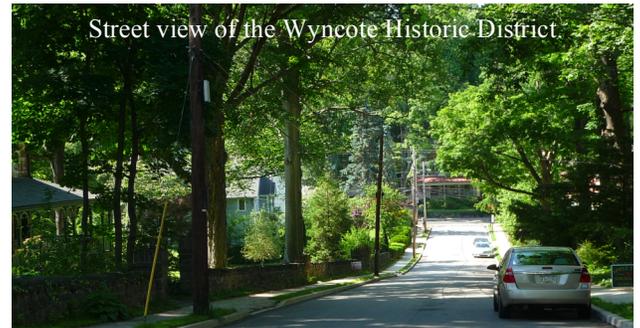
If you are considering window repair or replacement for your property, first read *Preservation Brief 9: The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows* ([www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief09.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief09.htm)), and Cheltenham Township's brochures, *Historic Windows and Sustainability* (<http://cheltenham.municipalcms.com/docview.aspx?docid=2714>) and *Guidelines for Wood Windows* ([www.cheltenhamtownship.org/documents.aspx](http://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/documents.aspx)), then solicit estimates from carpenters who specialize in the repair of historic windows, as well as from contractors who advocate the wholesale replacement of windows. Window replacement may not lead to the savings in energy costs that you hope for (see the Township's brochures, *Historic Preservation and Sustainability* [[www.cheltenhamtownship.org/files/documents/build\\_zone/chel2008-sustainability-brochure-laidout.pdf](http://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/files/documents/build_zone/chel2008-sustainability-brochure-laidout.pdf)] and *Historic Windows and Sustainability* for a more detailed discussion).

- **Exterior Woodwork**

If you are considering repairs to exterior woodwork on your property, first read *Preservation Brief 10: Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork* ([www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief10.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief10.htm)) and Cheltenham Township's *Guidelines for Exterior Woodwork* ([www.cheltenhamtownship.org/documents.aspx](http://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/documents.aspx)) to make yourself an informed customer, then solicit bids from contractors who specialize in historic buildings.

- **Roofs**

If you are planning work on your roof, first read *Preservation Brief 4: Roofing for Historic*



*Buildings* ([www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief04.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief04.htm)) and Cheltenham Township's *Guidelines for Roofing* ([www.cheltenhamtownship.org/documents.aspx](http://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/documents.aspx)) to understand all of the options at your disposal and then solicit estimates from contractors who specialize in repair of historic roofing materials as well as from contractors who primarily use modern roofing materials. You may discover that your historic roof has more lifespan and you will have a more complete understanding of potential interventions.

- **Porches**

If you plan to work on your historic porch, you should review the information in *Preservation Brief 45: Preserving Historic Wooden Porches* ([www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief45.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief45.htm)) and then solicit bids from contractors who have experience working on similar projects.

- **Energy Efficiency**

If you are planning any work on your building to improve its energy efficiency, it is best to thoroughly understand your entire building. First review *Preservation Brief 3: Improving Energy Efficiency in Historic Buildings* ([www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief03.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief03.htm)) and for more information, Cheltenham Township's brochure, *Historic Preservation and Sustainability* ([www.cheltenhamtownship.org/files/documents/build\\_zone/chel2008-sustainability-brochure-laidout.pdf](http://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/files/documents/build_zone/chel2008-sustainability-brochure-laidout.pdf)).

- **Additions**

If you are considering constructing an addition on your building, first review *Preservation Brief 14: New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns* ([www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief14.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief14.htm)) and use the information in that document to ask your design professional and contractor pointed, educated questions.