

Silesia (80-000)

Silesia is a small community which was established in the late nineteenth century in western Prince George's County west of Indian Head Highway, near Fort Washington. Centered around the intersection of Livingston Road and Fort Washington Road, the small community is largely the product of a family of German immigrants who settled in Prince George's County at the end of the nineteenth century.

Robert Stein, born in the Silesia region of Prussia, immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century to study at Georgetown University. After graduating, Stein returned briefly to Germany where he recruited his brother and a friend to return with him to Prince George's County. Upon his return, Robert Stein purchased 320 acres of land near Broad Creek, which was then named Broad Creek Farm. This large parcel of land contained Harmony Hall (PG: 80-024-011), an early-eighteenth-century Georgian mansion and Want Water (PG: 80-024-010, now ruinous), an early-eighteenth-century house. Stein's land extended east across present-day Livingston Road and south to the future intersection of Livingston Road and Fort Washington Road.¹

Over time, Stein, his brother, and their friend Joseph Adler began encouraging their families to immigrate to the United States and settle in Broad Creek. In 1889, Robert Stein petitioned the courts to have the small community named Silesia, after his homeland.² The number of newcomers began to grow, and by 1930, a community of Germans and their first generation of American-born children was established. Census records from 1920 and 1930 indicate that the residents of Silesia made their living by farming, as laborers, or as merchants.³ In 1903, a post office and one-room school opened. The Silesia School served the community until the opening of a larger school in Oxon Hill in 1923. The White Horse Tavern, an early-nineteenth-century landmark in Silesia, was demolished in 1903 and Robert Stein constructed a grocery and feed store on the site.⁴ The Tilch family (related to the Steins) also constructed a tavern in Silesia in 1935.⁵ Further growth in the established community remained relatively stagnant until the limited residential construction occurred in the 1950s off of Livingston Road.

After the opening of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and the Capital Beltway in the early 1960s, the western portion of Prince George's County, where Silesia is located, began to grow. Although Silesia remained relatively unchanged during this period, the increasing number of children in the larger area resulted in the construction of Harmony Hall Elementary School in 1965 just north of Silesia and south of Harmony Hall. The school operated until 1981 when it was closed and later enlarged for use as a regional arts center.⁶

Today, the small community of Silesia remains a quiet and largely undeveloped area. The Broad Creek Historic District (PG: 80-024), located immediately to the north of Silesia, and parkland surrounding the

¹ "Exhibits B and C, History of Silesia," presented at the Broad Creek Historic District Public Meeting, 20 March 1984, located in the Silesia file at M-NCPPC Historic Preservation office Prince George's County, p. 1.

² Elizabeth J. Hutchinson, "Silesia: Formerly White Horse Sign," unpublished paper, 19 May 1969.

³ 1920 United States Federal Census, Maryland, Prince George's County, Piscataway, District 73, sheets 6B-7A; 1930 United States Federal Census, Maryland, Prince George's County, Piscataway, District 12, sheet 1B.

⁴ Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, "Broad Creek Historic District Preservation Planning Study" (Upper Marlboro, Maryland: The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, June 2002), 31.

⁵ "Exhibits B and C, History of Silesia," presented at the Broad Creek Historic District Public Meeting, 20 March 1984, located in the Silesia file at M-NCPPC Historic Preservation office Prince George's County, p. 1-2.

⁶ M-NCPPC, "Broad Creek Historic District Preservation Plan Study," 37.

community have helped Silesia resist the development pressures occurring elsewhere in Prince George's County. There are approximately 40 residents in Silesia.⁷

There are currently no designated Historic Sites or Resources in Silesia.

Windshield Survey

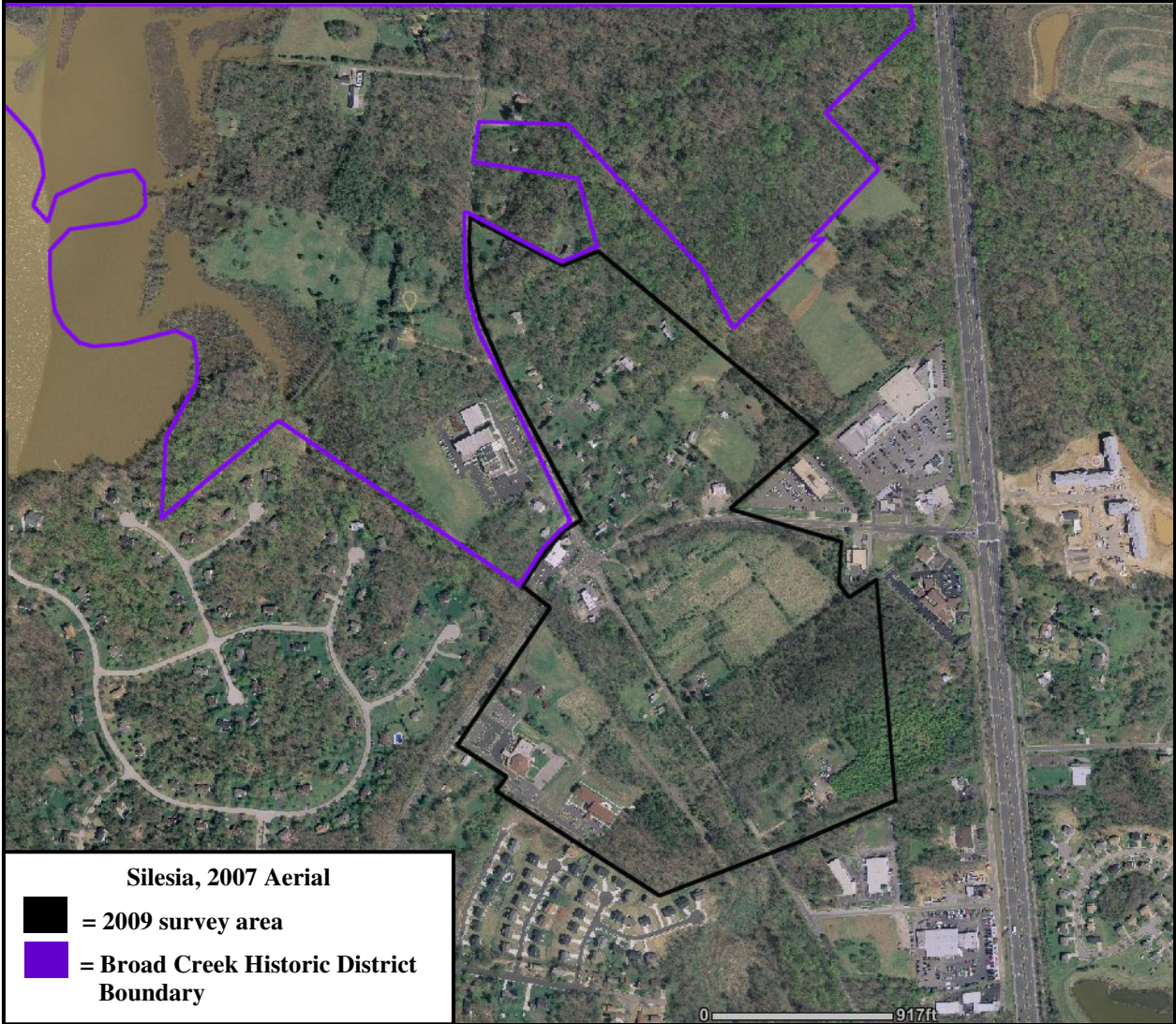
A windshield survey of Silesia was conducted in January 2009. The survey area consists of approximately 36 primary resources clustered around the intersection of Livingston Road and Fort Washington Road. Silesia is located immediately south of the southern boundary of the Broad Creek Historic District (PG: 80-024). The community contains a variety of buildings constructed between ca. 1925 and the 1980s. Both residential and commercial buildings are located in Silesia. Architectural styles present in the community include Craftsman and various illustrations of the Modern Movement. Building forms include bungalows and ranch houses. Several of the houses appear to be kit houses, particularly those at 11015-11019 Livingston Road and 10706 Livingston Road. Residential buildings are typically wood-frame construction and are one to one-and-one-half stories in height. The buildings in the community are very modest, with minimal ornamentation. Outbuildings are numerous and include sheds, utility sheds, equipment sheds, and small barns. The community is set on gently rolling hills with large portions of heavily wooded and undeveloped land. Houses are set on lots of varying sizes and shapes with inconsistent setbacks. The sizes and shapes of the parcels are indicative of the subdivisions of large lots by family members rather than a single subdivider or builder.

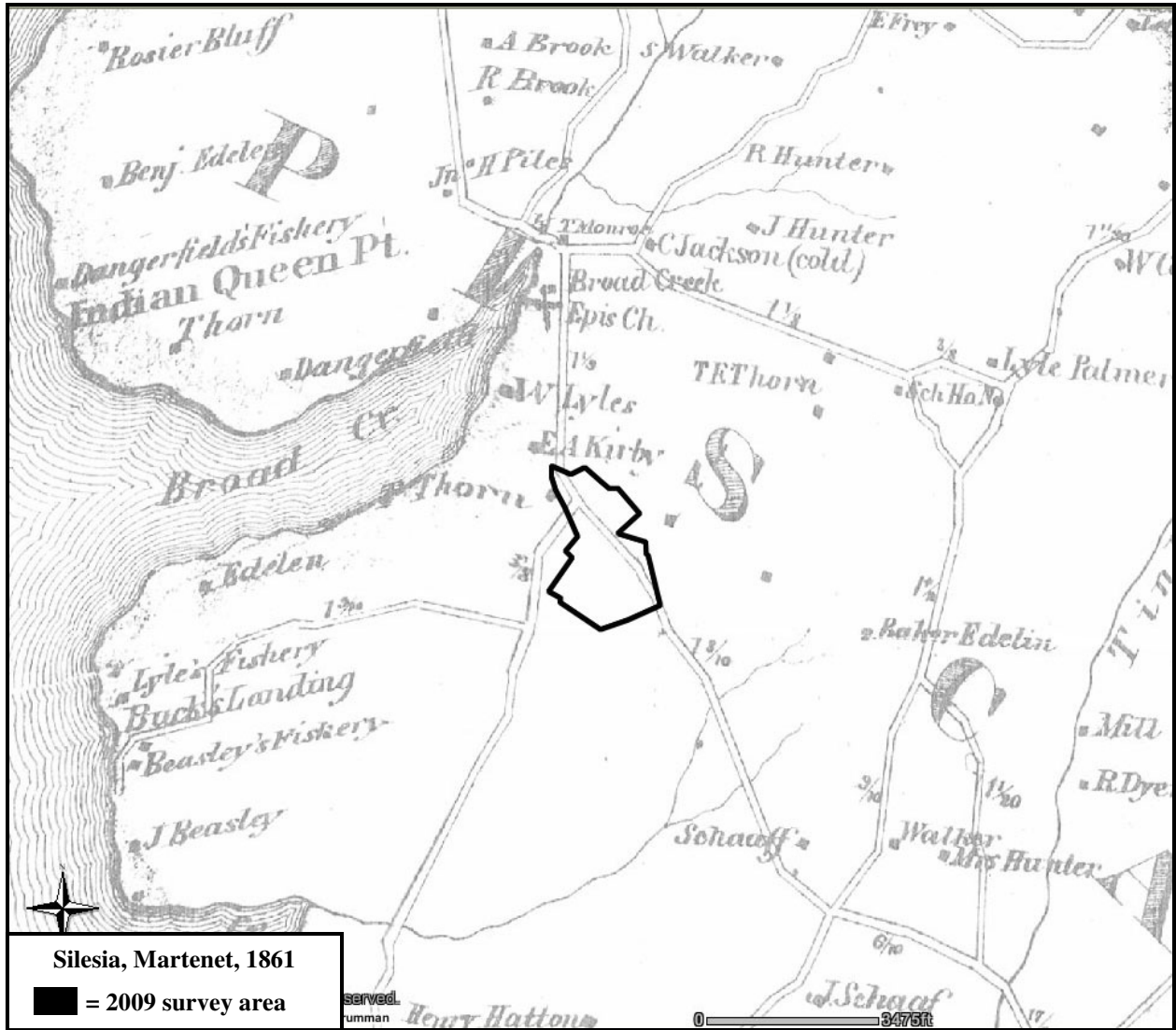
Historic District Evaluation

Silesia represents several Prince George's County Heritage Themes including taverns and residential architectural styles. However, Silesia is not recommended eligible for listing as either a National Register historic district or as a Prince George's County historic district. The community sporadically developed over a period of approximately 75 years. Initial development in Silesia occurred at the turn of the twentieth century; however there are no extant resources that document the community's initial settlement. Noted losses include the White Horse Tavern and the Silesia School. Limited development occurred in the 1920s and 1930s with the construction of several modest houses for members of the Stein, Tilch, and Adler families. This was followed in the 1950s with limited residential construction and again in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the construction of a commercial building and a gas station. Although the community is historic, it fails to meet the criteria for listing as a historic district. Silesia has retained its integrity of location, design, workmanship, and materials, but no longer retains integrity of feeling or association.

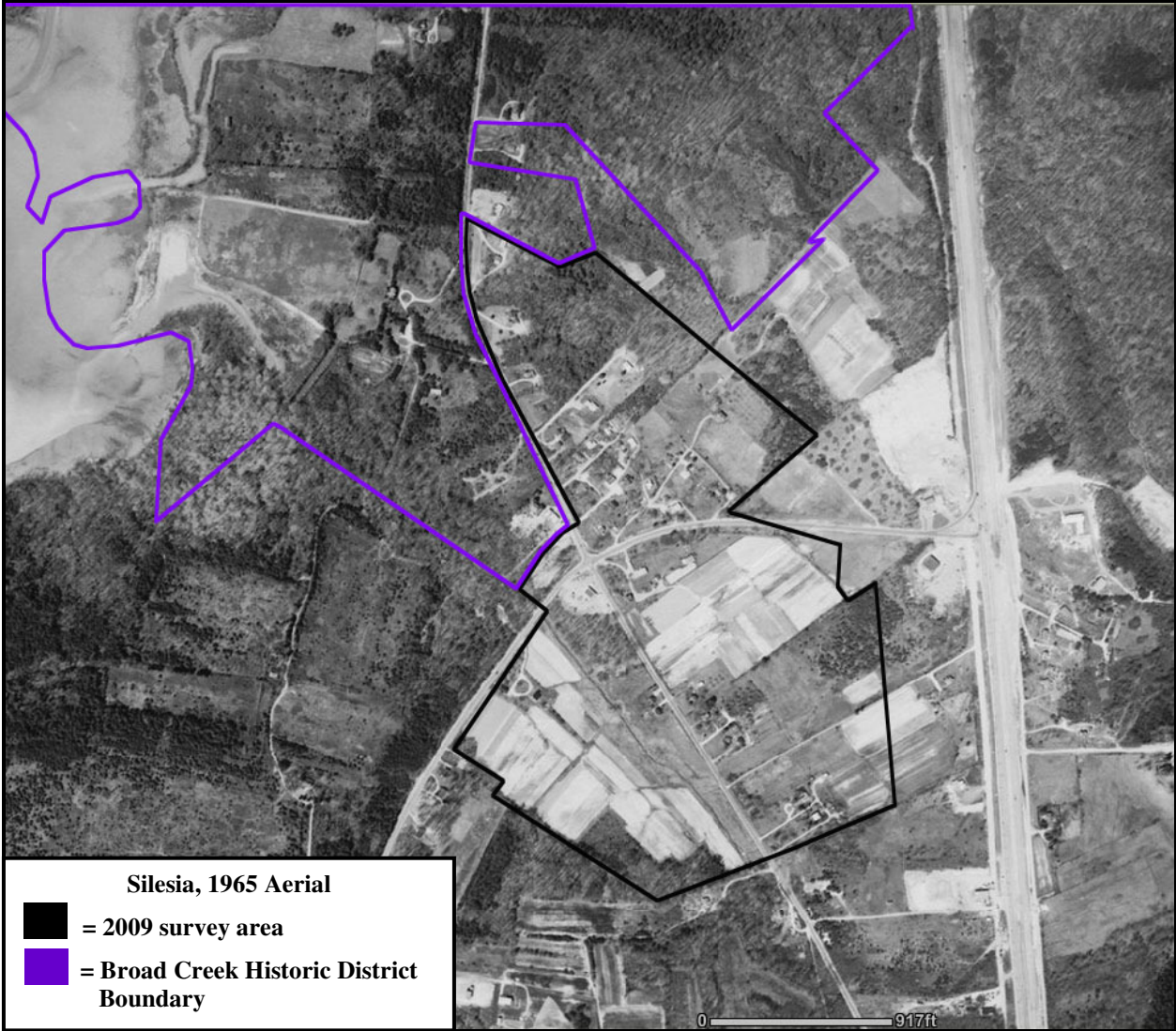
Prepared by EHT Tracerics, Inc.
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⁷ Eugene L. Meyer, "Prussian Echoes in a Handed-Down Hamlet," *The Washington Post*, 1 September 2001, p. H1.











Looking north, 10909 Fort Washington Road (*EHT Traceries, 2009*)



Looking south, 11015-11019 Livingston Road (*EHT Traceries*, 2009)



Looking northeast, 11036 Livingston Road (*EHT Traceries*, 2009)



Looking northeast, 11011-11009 Fort Washington Road (*EHT Traceries, 2009*)



Looking east, 10706 Livingston Road (*EHT Traceries*, 2009)



Looking east, 10412-10500 Livingston Road (*EHT Tracerics, 2009*)



Looking east, 10310-10314 Livingston Road, in Broad Creek Historic District⁸ (*EHT Traceries, 2009*)

⁸ Some properties located in the Broad Creek Historic District were photographed during the survey because they were once either part of Silesia or closely associated with the community's history.



Looking northwest, Harmony Hall Regional Center, 10701 Livingston Road, in Broad Creek Historic District (*EHT Traceries*, 2009)



Looking southwest, 10905 Livingston Road, in Broad Creek Historic District (*EHT Traceries, 2009*)