JOHNSTOWN INCLINED RAILWAY

INCLINED PLANE

LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:

STREET (JOHNSTOWN) AND EDGEMILL DRIVE (WESTMONT)

CITY OR TOWN:

JOHNSTOWN

STATE:

PENNSYLVANIA CODE: 42 COUNTY: CAMBRIA CODE: 021

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)

- District
- Site
- Object

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

In Process

Being Considered

STATUS (Check One)

- Occupied
- Unoccupied
- Preservation work in progress

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

- Yes:
- Restricted
- Unrestricted
- No

INSTRUCTIONS

COUNTY OF PROPERTY

JOHNSTOWN BOROUGH (LEASED TO THE CAMBRIA COUNTY TOURIST COUNCIL)

CITY OR TOWN:

JOHNSTOWN

STATE:

PENNSYLVANIA CODE: 42

LEGAL DESCRIPTION

CAMBRIA COUNTY COURTHOUSE

CITY OR TOWN:

CAMBRIA

STATE:

PENNSYLVANIA CODE: 42

SHEET SURVEYS

- FOR SURVEY RECORDS

STATE:

PENNSYLVANIA CODE: 42
The Inclined Plane Railway was built as a "lifesaver" after the Johnstonson flood of May 31, 1889. It was constructed with a 988.5 foot runway at 71 per cent grade. The wheels, rails and other parts were adapted from standard railroad equipment by the Cambria Iron Company. The lower entrance to the Railway, crossing Stonycreek, consisted of a heavy iron bridge constructed with three-foot-thick iron girders and supported by immense stone abutments. The Railway itself was made up of two cable driven cars, each of which weighed 42 tons with a 15-ton capacity per car. The cable was 2 inches in diameter, 1130 feet in length, and consisted of one pulling cable and one safety cable capable of supporting over 165 tons.

The largest object in the Railway's engine room was a steam driven, cast iron drum, 50 feet in circumference and 15 feet in diameter, around which the cable from the cars was wound. There were two, foot controlled air brakes located on the left side of the drum while an emergency "bull brake" was situated on the right side.

The unique design of the cars provided a level ride for horses and wagons (and later, cars and trucks) and pedestrians, and was copied from the ten Planes which hauled cargo across the Allegheny Mountains on the Portage Railroad.

The only major change made since its construction has been replacement of the original steam engine with a 400 horsepower electric motor in 1962, when the entire Railway was restored and reopened by the Cambria County Tourist Council.
Construction of the Railway was undertaken by the Cambria Iron Company, a predecessor of Bethlehem Steel Company, in 1890 and opened for business on June 1, 1891. It cost the company $133,296 and was intended to provide easy transportation up Yoder Hill for the residents of the iron company's new reality development - Westmont. For over 25 years it served as a safe and sure link to the community situated on the rim of the hill overlooking Johnstown. Because of its convenience and access to the heart of the business district, it was directly responsible for Westmont becoming one of the nation's first residential suburbs.

In 1935 Bethlehem Steel sold the Railway to Westmont Borough for $1. The Railway more than lived up to its original lifesaving purpose on March 17, 1936 when it carried over 4,000 men, women, and children to safety from the flood waters of the Conemaugh and Stonycreek valleys.

As better roads were built up the hill following WW II, use of the Railway declined, and it was closed by Westmont on January 31, 1962. It was reopened, however, on July 1, 1962 after an extensive restoration project under the auspices of the Cambria County Tourist Council and the Johnstown Chamber of Commerce.

In over 80 years of operation, the Inclined Plane Railway has carried over 40 million passengers and countless vehicles with the loss of only one life due to an accident.
SIGNIFICANCE CONT.

INvolving a truck on one of the railway cars and not because of any malfunctioning of equipment. It is one of the longest and steepest hoists in the world and one of the few transportation systems of its kind still in existence. The railway further attests to the 19th century engineering ingenuity of the Welsh and German immigrants in promoting the industrial and commercial growth of Western Pennsylvania.
**10. Geographic Data**

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Approximate acreage of nominated property: Less than 5 acres

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

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name and Title: Pennsylvania Historic Sites and Landmarks

Organization: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

Street and Number: Box 1026

City or Town: Harrisburg

State: Pennsylvania

**12. State Liaison Officer Certification**

Owner of property notified 10/5/72

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National [X]  State [ ]  Local [ ]

Name: 

Title: Deputy Executive Director, Pa. Historical and Museum Commission

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date