

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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14

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Reading Hardware Company Butt Works

AND/OR COMMON

The Hardware

## 2 LOCATION

STREET &amp; NUMBER

537 Willow Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Reading

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

6

STATE

Pennsylvania.

CODE

42

COUNTY

Berks

CODE

011

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

## CATEGORY

 DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

 PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

 IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

 OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

 YES: RESTRICTED YES: UNRESTRICTED NO

## PRESENT USE

 AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Redevelopment Authority of the City of Reading

STREET &amp; NUMBER

510 Penn Square Center, 601 Penn Street

CITY, TOWN

Reading

VICINITY OF

STATE

Pennsylvania

19601

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Berks County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Sixth &amp; Court Streets

CITY, TOWN

Reading

STATE

Pennsylvania

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Pennsylvania Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

5/21/79

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

PHMC

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# DESCRIPTION

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

The building located at the corner of Willow and Pearl Streets in Reading, is a factory loft building constructed in 1875. Intended for manufacturing, and used originally by the Reading Hardware Company, the building is characteristic of industrial buildings of its period. High ceilings and a minimum of columns contributed to its flexibility of use. Many large windows were needed to bring in light and ventilation for workers in the period pre-dating efficient artificial illumination and ventilation or air conditioning. The width of the building's wings was limited to 35-40 feet to enable natural light to reach all work areas. Heavy mill construction allowed heavy machinery loads and contributed to fire safety. A large central boiler house generated steam for space heating by means of a piping system to cast iron radiators. It is likely that steam also powered the industrial machinery from a central location, being transmitted by shafts, belts and pulleys from a central engine vertically to each floor through a large shaftway and then horizontally to the work areas in each wing of the building. When electric motor driven machinery came into common use, this system was made obsolete.

Exterior

The building consists of two wings probably built about the same time. A four-story and basement wing faces Willow Street, and a three-story and crawl space wing along Pearl Street. The four-story wing is of full mill construction: masonry exterior bearing walls, heavy timber interior columns, beams and girders, and a laminated deck wood floor. The three-story wing is of modified mill construction, with cast iron columns, and heavy joists in place of the beam and girder systems. The roof structure in both wings consists of a heavy timber truss spanning from wall to wall, thus eliminating interior columns on the uppermost floor of each wing. Vertical shaftways and stairs are enclosed in masonry walls, for fire separation from floor to floor.

The masonry exterior bearing walls are characterized by simple, common bond brick masonry three wythes in thickness. Two or three-course masonry arches are used to create all window openings, avoiding the cost of steel lintels. The original sash, where remaining, are large wood double and triple hung windows to allow maximum ventilation in hot weather. Windows in the building are closely and regularly spaced to distribute light evenly in the work areas, yet maintain the structural capacity of the exterior bearing walls. Decorative elements are few, consisting only of several corbeled courses of masonry at the eave lines, and cast iron "stars" as either end of the top floor of the four story wing adds a special character to the building and is a distinctive feature.

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Of special interest is the boiler house, an appurtenant structure between wings. Similar in style to the two main wings, it has special features such as a central lantern monitor on the roof, lighting the interior, and an arch window in the end wall. Two square free-standing brick chimneys rise where the boiler house meets the four story wing, tapering gracefully to reflect diminishing compressive loads as the chimneys increase in height.

The courtyard between the two wings is enclosed by masonry walls and is entirely paved in brick. This obviously served as the primary outdoor shipping, receiving, and marshalling area, as well as for access to the boiler house for coal, ash removal, and maintenance.

Additions and alterations to the main structure have been few. Two concrete masonry exit stair towers were added at an uncertain date (probably in the 1940's), and a small two story structure on the courtyard side was added to serve as a loading dock on the first floor, and possibly a supervisory office on the second floor. Several exterior openings on the first floor have been modified over the years to add an entrance and loading dock on the Pearl Street side of the building, and to add other entrances or exits at needed locations.

Interior

Subdivision of the interior spaces is minimal and limited to light wood partitioning at several locations to separate supervisory and clerical workers from the factory operations. The interior consists primarily of large open loft space for maximum flexibility. The four-story wing has four spaces approximately 35' by 130' with one central masonry fire division wall. Columns occur at 10 foot spacing down the center of the three-story wing (except top floor), and a partial line of columns in the four-story wing, at 10 foot spacing, leaves a clear span of 30 feet in those areas. The insides of exterior brick walls are exposed, and uninsulated. Interior ceilings and walls have been whitewashed to aid in maintaining even, natural lighting. The entire structural system is exposed to view, and the notched and joined framing of the top floor trusses is especially interesting. One small toilet room is located on each floor, and a pass-thru freight elevator located at the common wall of the two wings provided access for heavy equipment and supplies. A sprinkler system has been installed throughout the building, and exposed electrical wiring on porcelain insulators (no longer permitted) remains in the building for supplemental incandescent lighting.

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The entire structure is in extremely good condition except for minor deterioration of some masonry walls. The building is plumb, level, and true, and shows no evidence of structural settlement or deterioration. It is an especially fine example of nineteenth century factory loft construction and one of very few similar buildings of its type in the City of Reading.

# 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 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 type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input 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 1875

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Today, the only remaining buildings to what once comprised the Reading Hardware Company complex are the Oscar Daniels and Company warehouse, owned by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Reading, and the Sheerlund Properties buildings, located at the intersection of Pearl and Willow Streets. (See enclosed survey drawing by C.T. Walker, October 28, 1924). The Oscar Daniels and Company building, located on the northeast corner of the intersection, was constructed in 1875, with additions in 1880 and 1892, as the butt works of the Reading Hardware Company. At around the turn of the century the butt works was relocated, and the building was reused as a churnhouse for the adjacent foundry to the north. The Sheerlund Properties buildings located to the south of Willow Street were constructed in 1888, with additions in 1921, and 1926. The 1888 structure was used for warehousing and offices and the 1926 structure was a manufacturing building noted for its vertical production line, which descended from upper story foundries to the lower story finishing and shipping areas. Together, the three buildings are one of the last remnants of Reading's prestigious iron industry that began in the 18th century and expanded into the 19th century, becoming a prime mover in Reading's greatest period of industrial, commercial and residential growth.

The City of Reading, because of its proximity to the Pennsylvania coal fields and the abundance of local iron ore and timber, was a pioneer city in the development of the iron industry in America. Furnaces, foundries, forges, rolling mills, sheet metal mills with all kindred iron and steel producing plants were early in the field of industry in Reading.

William Harbster, the founder of the Reading Hardware Company, began his career as a blacksmith apprentice in Boyertown and subsequently, worked as a journeyman in area foundries and with the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company, before starting his first smithy shop, with the assistance of his brother, Matthan, in Hamburg doing manufacturing and iron work for carriages for a period of two years. With the advice and assistance of his brother-in-law, William M. Griscom, in 1851, William opened a small blacksmith shop at the foot of South Sixth Street. One year later, William, in conjunction with his two younger brothers, Matthan and John, formed the partnership of Harbster Brothers.

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They erected a small foundry and capitalized on the rapidly expanding demand for cast iron hardware by manufacturing building hardware supplies (locks, bolts, latches). In 1858, William M. Griscom, joined the partnership, changing the firm's name to Harbster Brothers and Company. While references dispute the exact time the firm changed its name to the Reading Hardware Company, dates range from 1862 to 1882, the term "The Hardware" was a local reference well before the Reading Hardware Company incorporated in 1886.

The Reading Hardware Company was very successful for their unique and artistic designs in fine bronze and iron hardware articles which became the preference with the most prominent architects and builders in the country. The most notable goods were locks, latches, knob and lock furniture, butts, and specialty hardware.

The Reading Hardware Company made a specialty of furnishing large hotels and office buildings in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago with all the necessary hardware. The Reading Hardware Company received international fame by winning first prize in both the Centennial and Paris Expositions for the quality and design of their hardware.

In 1887, the Reading Hardware Company was destroyed by perhaps the most spectacular blaze of the period where, even though the firemen fought valiantly for twenty-one consecutive hours, the plant was gutted and losses mounted to \$475,000. However, the works were rebuilt immediately--larger and better than originally. It covered an area exceeding five acres, comprised of substantial brick buildings, three and four stories in height, all specially constructed for the operation carried on in them, and all equipped with all the modern conveniences known in the business. The building included large storage warehouses for the complete articles of manufacture, shops where the artistic finishing was done by expert workmen, a Japanning building, lock and general hardware buildings, shops for drilling, plating, bronzing and finishing, machine shop, butt and screw factories, and all buildings were completely furnished with the best mechanical appliances, serving to reduce expenses while turning out better and better products each year.

With the beginning of the 1900's, the Reading Hardware Company was one of the most extensive plants in the world. Branch offices were established in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco. Internationally, Reading Hardware goods were sold in Canada, Cuba, the South American states, and Europe. The Reading Hardware Company had invested a million dollars; employed 860 individuals; paid wages annually of \$400,000, and did an annual business of more than a million dollars.

In 1932, the Reading Hardware Corporation leased the butt works/

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churnhouse building to two Philadelphia businessmen, Henry Vogt and Alfred Schraps, who operated the Junior Hosiery Mill. With growth of their business, the land and building were acquired by the Junior Hosiery Mill, Incorporated in December, 1943. At the peak of the Junior Hosiery Mill's operations, it had approximately 350 employees, and it continued in business until 1955.

Robert Sullivan whose early career included that of being a short story writer for the Saturday Evening Post under the pen name of Eric Fleet, gained association with Reading Hardware by his marriage to Caroline Horst, daughter of George Horst. Sullivan's background was in metallurgy, and on this basis the United States Navy approached him in 1939 in order to treat, harden and fabricate rolled steel into armor plate. A portion of the hardware complex was made available to Sullivan as a working area for his armor plate project, and after a six month transition, which involved employment of approximately 100 men under the direct supervision of Sullivan, the Reading Hardware was fabricating the finest armor plate in the world. This program was carried out as a private venture with no financial aid from the Navy. During World War II the Reading Hardware Corporation ceased manufacturing hardware and went 100% into producing ordnance materials such as armor plate, shells, helmets, bomb fuses and metal skins for airplanes as protection against anti-aircraft fire.

After World War II the Reading Hardware Corporation resumed the manufacturing of hardware and lawn mowers until 1950, when they sold all their machinery and leased the entire complex to the Army Air Corps for use as a distribution warehouse, shipping parts all over the world. The Reading Hardware Corporation went out of business in 1950.

See Continuation Sheet

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .77

QUADRANGLE NAME Reading, Pa.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 421347 4464000  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B           
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See Continuation Sheet

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

Redevelopment Authority of the City of Reading

ORGANIZATION

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

510 Penn Square Center, 601 Penn Street

215-375-4291

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Reading

Pennsylvania

**12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE xx

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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE Ed Weintraub, Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

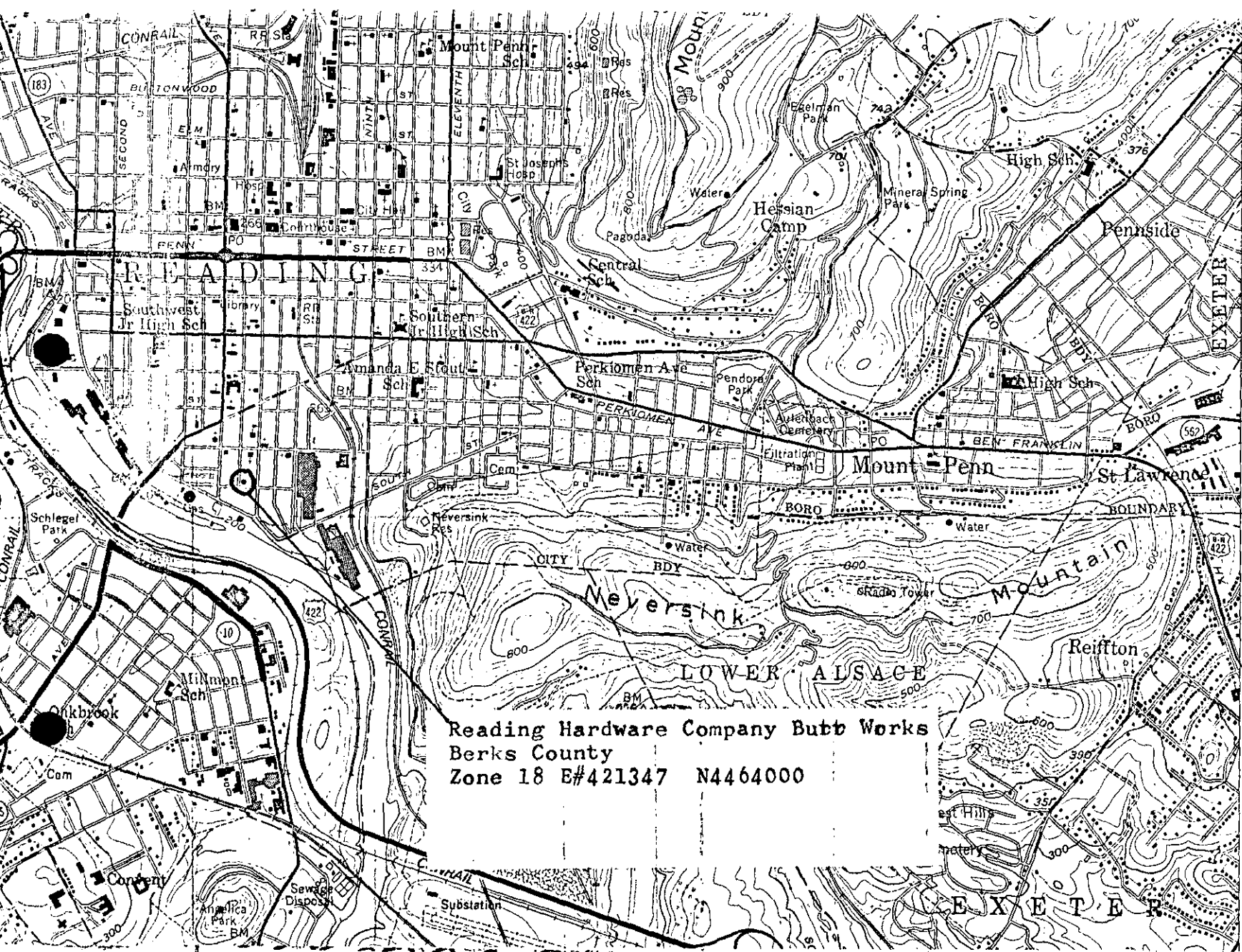
DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION



Verbal Boundary Description - "The Hardware"

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground, with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, situate on the North side of Willow Street, in the City of Reading, County of Berks and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, at the distance of one hundred twenty-five feet (125') Westwardly from the West side of Sixth Street, thence extending Westwardly along the North side of Willow Street, one hundred six feet seven and one-eighth inches (106' 7-1/8") to the East side of Pearl Street; thence extending Northwardly along the East side of said Pearl Street three hundred nineteen feet three and five-eighths inches (319' 3-5/8") to a point; thence extending Eastwardly at right angles to said Pearl Street one hundred six feet three-eighths inch (106' 3/8") to the West side of a ten feet (10') wide alley; thence extending Southwardly along the West side of said ten feet (10') wide alley three hundred eighteen feet five and three-eighths inches (318' 5-3/8") to the North side of Willow Street and the place of beginning.



Reading Hardware Company Butt Works  
Berks County  
Zone 18 E#421347 N4464000

4466  
ST. LAWRENCE 0.6 MI.  
BOYERTOWN 13 MI.  
BALMSTOWN 4.5 MI.  
DOUGLASVILLE 9.2 MI.  
4463  
(BIRDSBORO)  
5864 IV SE

30