

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic City Hall (Boys' High School)

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number 8th & Washington Streets \_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Reading \_\_\_ vicinity of congressional district 6th

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Berks code

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name City of Reading

street & number City Hall, 8th & Washington Streets

city, town Reading \_\_\_ vicinity of state Pennsylvania

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Berks County Courthouse

street & number 33 North 6th Street

city, town Reading state Pennsylvania

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Adaptive Reuse Feasibility Study this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

date July, 1979 \_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Bureau for Historic Preservation

city, town Harrisburg state Pennsylvania

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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 City Hall of Reading, Pennsylvania is located on the north side of Washington Street, with North Eighth Street on the west and Cedar Street on the east, on the northeastern edge of the Central Business District. It was constructed in 1904 as a high school for boys, and converted to its present use in 1928. The three-story structure has a frontage of 210 feet and extends northward 102 feet. The basement and first stories are faced with granite, while the second and third stories are of light gray brick. Some of the decorative details are executed in stone, and others in glazed terra-cotta. The building is the City's finest and purest example of the Beaux-Arts style.

The primary facade, on the south, is symmetrical. The basement story is faced with coursed quarry-faced ashlar. A wide stone sill course divides the basement from the first story, which is faced with rusticated stone with recessed horizontal borders. A second sill course divides the first story from the second and third stories, which are undivided and faced with light gray brick in one-third running bond. A wide terra-cotta entablature crowns the fourth story, consisting of a very plain architrave and frieze, and a dentiled cornice. Above the cornice is a brick and terra-cotta parapet embellished with terra-cotta knobs.

This front facade is divided into three sections by a projecting central portion. In the middle of this center area, a broad granite stairway leads up past an arcade of three arches to the recessed entrance. Each of the three arches has an ornate keystone, and the rusticated stone angles into each arch to form an archivolt. The words "City Hall" are carved into the second-story sill course, and the sill course is interrupted at each end of the arcade by a rectangular stone relief featuring a lion's head. On either side of the arcade, on the basement level, is a pair of rectangular windows, and above them on the first story, a pair of segmental-arched windows with decorative keystones. Above the arcade, the second and third stories are recessed and feature four large, engaged, stone Tuscan columns which rise from the second-story sill course to the entablature. There is a second-story and third-story window in each of the three spaces between the columns. The second-story windows have terra-cotta mouldings and pedimented terra-cotta window heads supported by consoles. The third-story windows are decorated with terra-cotta sills, mouldings and keystones. On the frieze, above each column, is a terra-cotta roundel in relief. The parapet above this section is faced entirely with terra-cotta, and is surmounted with an elaborate decorative pediment featuring garlands and a central medallion displaying the date "1928." The sides of the center section contain pairs of rectangular second-story and third-story windows. The second-story windows have terra-cotta keystones which partially overlap rectangular terra-cotta relief panels which are placed between the second and third stories. A terra-cotta sill stretches beneath each pair of third-story windows, and above each pair are three consoles connecting with the architrave. On either side of the pairs of windows, the brick projects beyond the brick surrounding the windows, and is laid with horizontal recesses: these four sections resemble rusticated pilasters repeating the dimensions of the columns. Above each of these "pilasters," on the frieze, is a terra-cotta roundel. Surmounting each of these two areas flanking the entrance is a monumental curved pediment of terra-cotta, with a dentiled raking cornice, a decorative keystone, and elaborate sculptured decoration in the interior. The parapets are flanked by knobs.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

City Hall (Boy's High School)

Continuation sheet

Berks County

Item number

7

Page

2

The windows of the east and west ends of this primary facade are of the same design as the windows flanking the entrance. There are two sets of four windows at each end. The basement windows are small and rectangular. The first-story windows have segmental arches and keystones. The brick surrounding the second and third-story windows is recessed slightly from the rest of the facade. The second-story windows are rectangular and unadorned. The fourth-story windows are identical, with the addition of a terra-cotta sill under each set of four windows, and terra-cotta brackets between and flanking the windows and connecting with the architrave.

The eastern and western facades are identical, and a subtle variation on the main facade. These facades are also symmetrical, with a central section and side sections. The central section has one large semi-circular archway leading to a recessed entrance. The arch has an elaborate keystone, and above it a terra-cotta hood on the sill-course level, supported by two large sculptured consoles. On either side of the archway, on the first-story, is a segmental-arched window. The second and third stories feature four brick pilasters with stone bases and capitals. The windows between these pilasters are identical to the central windows of the front facade, except that the second-story windows have keystones with rectangular terra-cotta panels above them instead of pediments.

The windows on the sides of the facades are identical to those on the front facade, except that they consist of one set of three windows per side instead of two sets of four.

The northern facade is of little importance, as it cannot be seen from the street: only a narrow passageway separates it from the neighboring structure. This facade is of red brick without ornament, out of character with the rest of the building. The major feature of this facade is the enormous complex of stained glass windows which was installed to embellish the Council Chamber in 1928.

Except for a few decorative additions, the three main facades of the building were not altered in the renovation of 1928, and have been little changed since that date: the basement windows east of the main entrance were recently bricked in, and a few windows have been partially filled in with wood to accommodate air conditioners.

# 8. 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The City Hall of Reading, Pennsylvania was originally constructed in 1904 as a boys' high school. When, in 1881, it was decided to sexually segregate the high school at Fourth and Court Streets, the male sector was temporarily removed to a building at Eighth and Penn Streets until a school building was constructed for them on the south-east corner of Eighth and Washington Streets, in 1884. Within twenty years the boys' high school had become insufficient for the City's swiftly growing population. A new high school for boys was built on the north side of Washington Street between Eighth and Cedar Streets. The school building was designed by the Philadelphia firm of Davis & Davis, and was constructed by the local contracting company of Seidel & Fink. This grand building, the best of very few examples of the Beaux-Arts style in Reading, immediately became a major landmark of the neighborhood and the City.

Seidel & Fink was one of Reading's most prominent contracting firms. The name of Fink was one of the most prominent in the local building industry throughout most of the City's history. The company was formed in 1903 when Andrew Jackson Fink and Thomas Seidel took over the firm of George W. Beard upon Beard's retirement. A.J. Fink studied architecture under Alexander F. Smith, who was later to be the architect of the 1928 renovation. Seidel & Fink was responsible for many of Reading's landmark structures, including St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church, the Berks County Trust Building, and the Wyomissing Club building. The firm received contracts for buildings throughout eastern Pennsylvan, New Jersey, and occasionally as far away as Dupont, Florida.

During the building's use as a high school, a collection of industrial materials was begun by the students with the help of their science teacher, Dr. Levi W. Mengel. This collection eventually expanded and grew into what is now the Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery. Dr. Mengel went on to become the Museum's first director in 1916.

The City Hall building at Fifth and Franklin Streets, which was first occupied in 1863, was known to be inadequate for the City's needs through the first decades of the Twentieth Century. In 1928 the City's voters approved a \$750,000 bond issue for the purpose of procuring a new City Hall. In that same year, a new co-educational high school was opened at Thirteenth and Douglass Streets, and the City, under the leadership of the nationally-famous Socialist Mayor J. Henry Stump, purchased the Boys' High School for \$510,000.

Within the next eleven months the Beaux-Arts structure underwent extensive interior renovation and was converted into a new City Hall.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

City Hall (Boys' High School)

Continuation sheet Berks County

Item number 8

Page 2

For NPS use only

received

date entered

The original partitions were removed and replaced with new walls and partitions made of brick, stone or tile. The original heating and lighting systems were replaced. The exterior remained intact with only a few minor changes. The City acted as its own contractor for the work, the plans for which were prepared under the direction and according to the ideas of City Councilman James M. Maurer. All the work was completed under his supervision. The architect of the interior renovations was the noted local architect Alexander F. Smith. Most of the renovation work was executed by local contractors and craftsmen.

The new City Hall was the product of the combined talents of the area's best constructors and craftsmen, and was the source of great admiration on the part of the City and its citizens. Some of the Interiors were themselves landmarks in local public interior decoration. As scribed in the 1929 City Hall dedication book:

"The Council Chamber (is) one of the show places of the building. (The) ... ceiling is ornamental in decorative detail, and is artistically shaded. The upper walls, also of plaster in a panel design, are delicately tinted and are set off to advantage by the wood paneling of the lower walls. The furniture, consisting as it does of mahogany tables, and walnut, leather covered chairs and benches, harmonizes with the general artistic atmosphere of the room, and produce just the background necessary to fittingly display the historic windows in the chamber."

The windows in the Council Chamber were the highlights of the renovated building. The large window dominating the northern end of the room is 20 feet wide and 22 feet high, and includes fourteen panels depicting local historical figures and landmarks in representation of the development of the City, crowned by the City Coat of Arms. The subjects of the series were referred to J. Bennett Nolan, a prominent local historian and journalist, representing the Berks County Historical Society, for criticism, confirmation of data, and graphic references from the Society's archives. The windows were designed by Paul Kase and executed in the studio of the J. M. Kase Glass Company. This firm, which operated from 1888 to 1975, was one of the leading art glass studios of eastern Pennsylvania, and was responsible for at least 90% of the unusual abundance of residential, religious, commercial and institutional art glass existing in Reading. The best art glass craftsmen in the area were employed at some time by this company, whose catalogues were nationally influential in

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

City Hall (Boys' High School)

Continuation sheet Berks County

Item number 8

Page 3

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Victorian and early Twentieth Century glass design.

Like J. Henry Stump, James M. Maurer, the City Councilman in charge of the renovation project, was a Socialist and a well-known political figure beyond the local scene. During his career he served as committee-man of Pennsylvania's Socialist Labor Party and later on the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party. In 1910 Maurer was elected to the Pennsylvania General Assembly; the first Socialist ever elected to that body, serving until 1918. He introduced the first bills in the Pennsylvania Legislature supporting workman's compensation and old age assistance, and was a prolific writer and speaker.

The City Hall is, by far, the purest remaining example of the Beaux-Arts style in Reading, and the only one serving an institutional function. Its textbook composition of classical Roman and some Italian Renaissance elements, with turn-of-the-century construction technology and craftsmanship, makes this structure not only a grand architectural landmark, but an irreplaceably unique one for Reading. The building's architecture also set an historical precedent as it was one of the very first local instances since the Federal Period of a grand, heavily-classical architecture being used for a monumental public structure: although most of the later examples were in the Classical Revival style, the "Boys" High School" provided a catalyst for such structures. Additionally, City Hall is one of the City's most significant examples of craftsmanship in both stone and molded terra-cotta. The exterior of the building is extremely well preserved.

Psychologically the City's premier public building since 1929, it is also crucial to the character of its neighborhood. Located on an important intersection in a potential historic district, it is one of the chief historical and architectural landmarks of that district, and an important element of the streetscape along Washington and North Eighth Streets. City Hall plays a large part in identifying its neighborhood as a boundary of the Central Business District. It is among Reading's most irreplaceable landmarks.

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

City Hall (Boys' High School)

Continuation sheet Berks County

Item number

9

Page 1

City of Reading, Bureau of Planning  
Adaptive Reuse Feasibility Study

City of Reading, Pa.  
Dedication Booklet of the City Hall, July 10, 1929

Albright, Raymond W.  
Two Centuries of Reading, Pa. 1748-1948  
Reading, Pa. 1948

Fox, Cyrus T., Biographic Index of Berks County  
New York, 1925

# 9. Major Bibliographical Reference

See continuation sheet

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .63

Quadrangle name Reading, Pa.

Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UMT References

A 18 +21710 4465460  
Zone Easting Northing

B                          
Zone Easting Northing

C                        

D                        

E                        

F                        

G                        

H                        

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Starting at a point on the NE corner of 8th & Washington moving north long eastside of 8th for 120 ft; then east for 230 ft; then south along westside of Cedar St. for 120 ft; then west along north side of Washington St. for 230 ft to starting point.

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

organization City of Reading date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number 8th & Washington Streets telephone 215/373/5111, ext. 326

city or town Reading state Pennsylvania

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

title Executive Director date \_\_\_\_\_

For HCRS use only

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

date \_\_\_\_\_

Keeper of the National Register

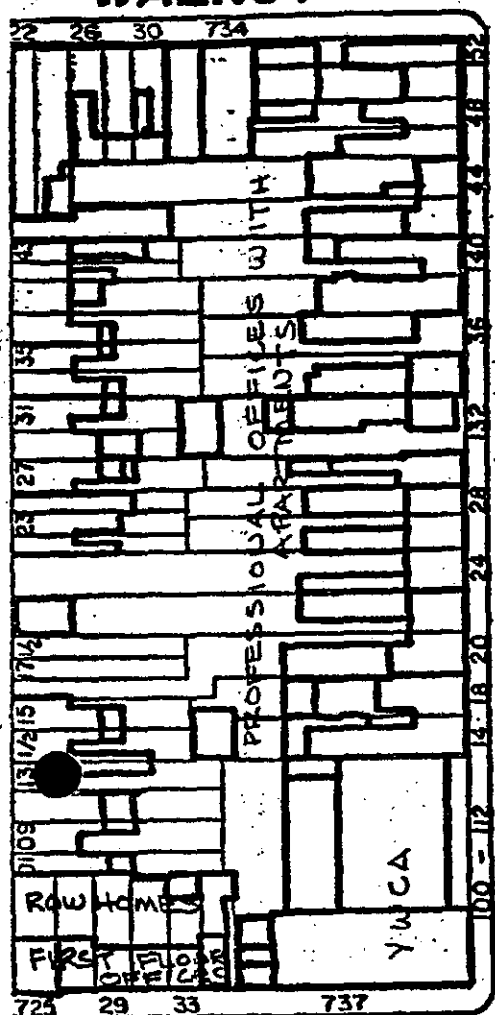
Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

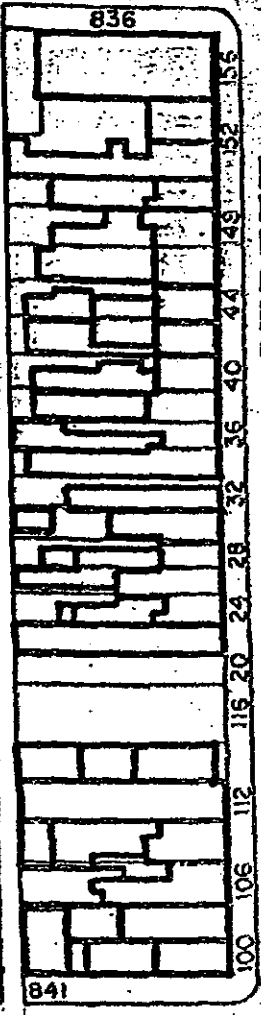
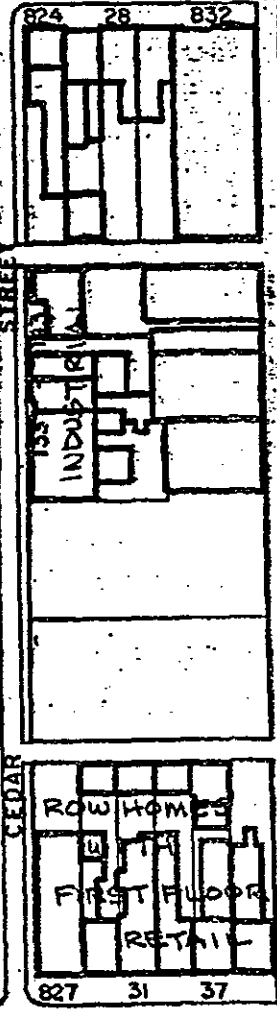
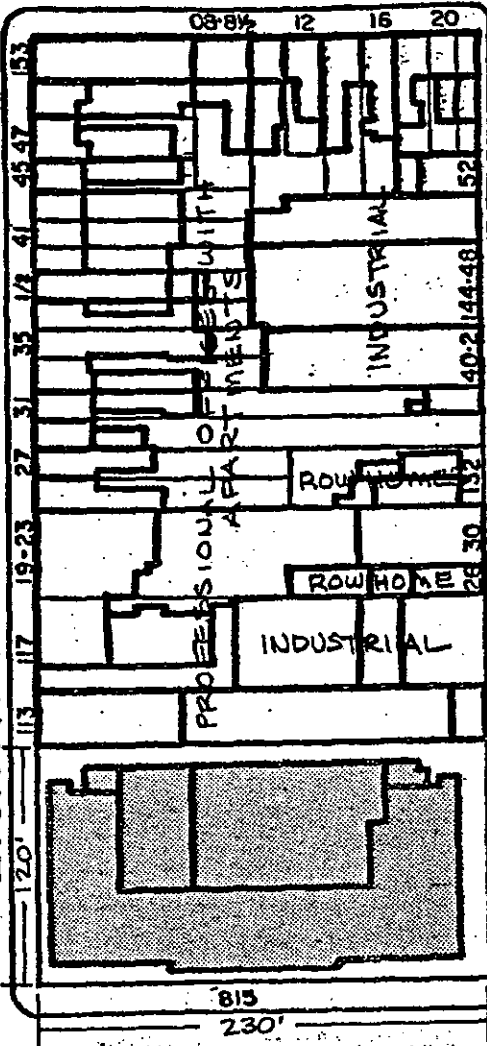


**WALNUT**

**STREET**

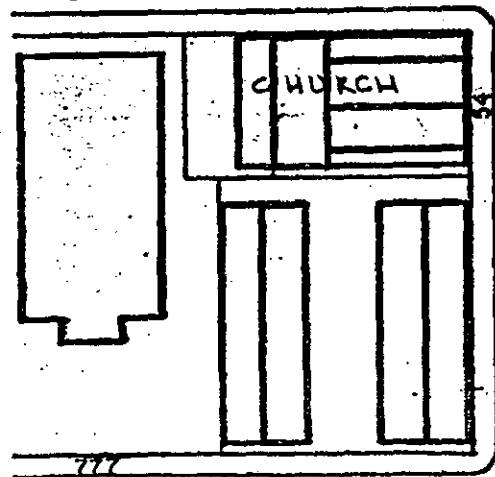


**EIGHTH STREET**

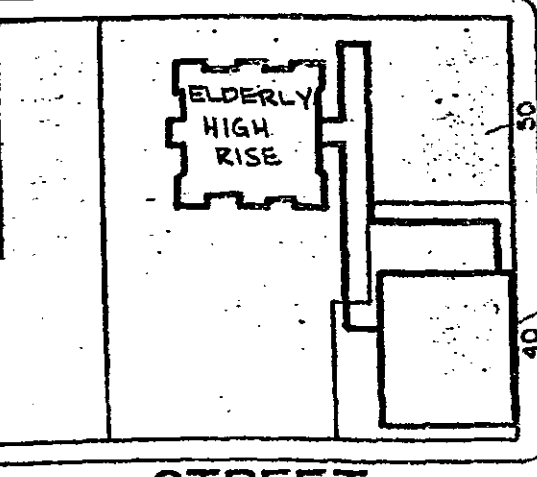
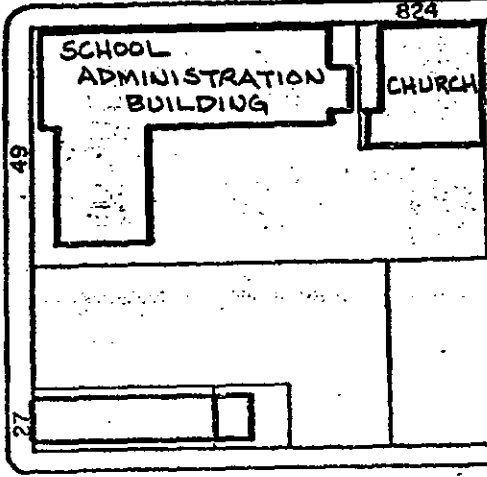


**WASHINGTON**

**STREET**

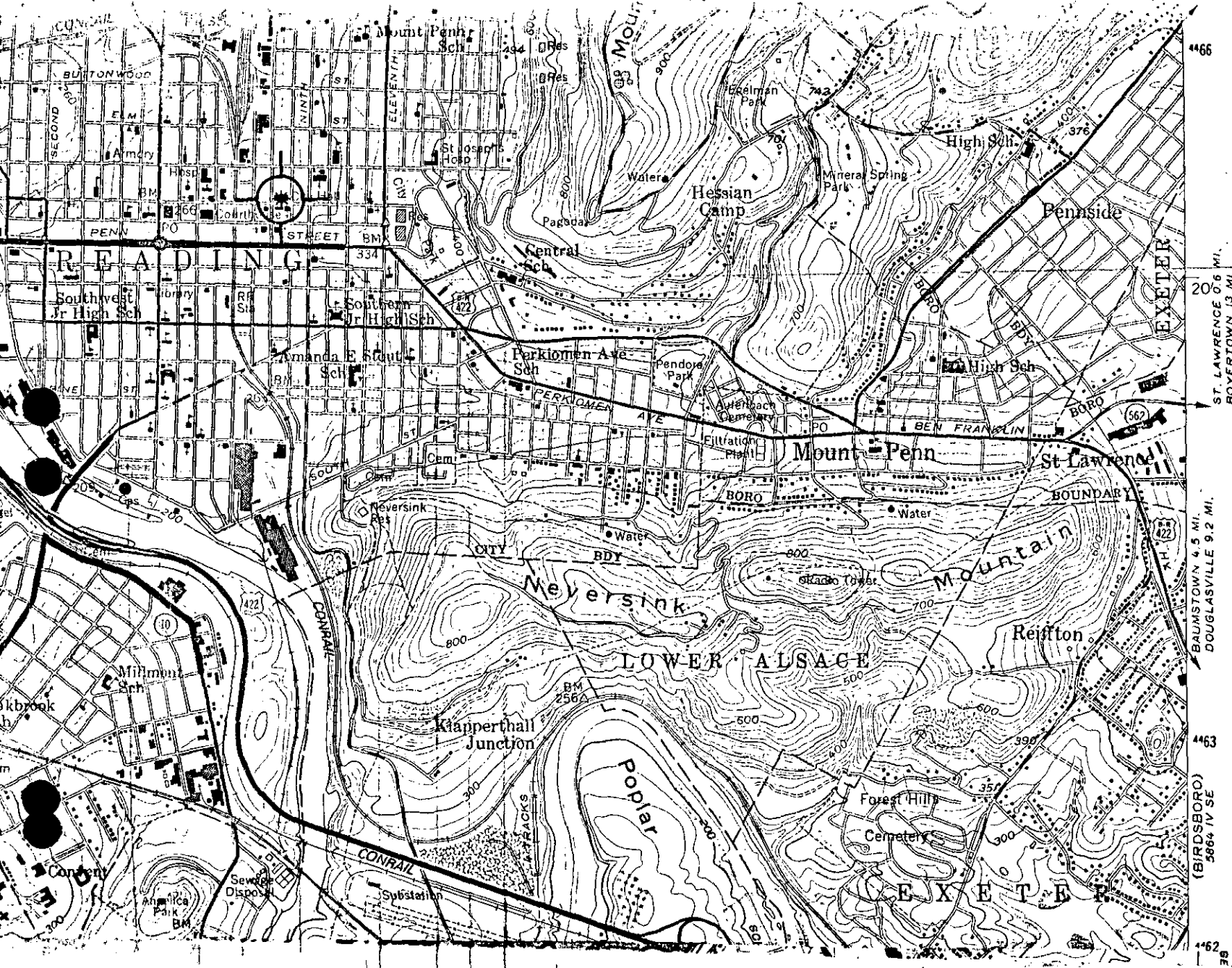


**NORTH**



**STREET**

**COURT**



466  
20  
ST. LAWRENCE 0.6 MI.  
BOYERTOWN 13 MI.  
4463  
BAUMSTOWN 4.5 MI.  
DOUGLASVILLE 9.2 MI.  
462

(BIRDSBORO)  
5864 IV SE