

**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 READING KNITTING MILLS

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 350 Elm Street

not for publication

city, town Reading

vicinity of

congressional district

6

state Pennsylvania

code

42

county

Berks

code

011

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Donald L. Helms

street & number 1526 Hill Road

city, town Reading

vicinity of

state

Pennsylvania 19602

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Berks County Courthouse

street & number 6th and Court Streets

city, town Reading

state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title City of Reading Historic Sites Survey

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1978-79

federal state county local

depository for survey records Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

city, town Harrisburg

state Pennsylvania

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The modestly handsome, Italianate-influenced structure stands four stories high, fifteen bays wide, by four bays deep. Architect L. H. Focht's 1891 design for a 3 story factory called for arched, double-sash, nine over nine windows, which still remain. Circa, 1920, a fourth floor was added above the remaining third story ornamental cornice of corbelled brick. Another corbelled brick cornice surmounts the fourth story. The gabled, slate roof is supported by 14 impressive wooden trusses; the lowest beams of the trusses are single pieces of wood, each about 35' in length. The style of the 4th floor addition completely matches the rest of the building, and the style of the entire factory harmonizes with, rather than dominates the surrounding homes.

A brick annex (20' x 30') to the west, used as a boiler house, was constructed along with the main building in 1891. In 1898, a one story brick addition was erected further to the west, extending over the ten foot easement between the knitting mills property and the property adjoining. The addition was built directly on top of the alleyway and uses the alleyway proper as its floor.

The first floor interior has a drop ceiling and partitions for offices and showrooms. A portion of the drop ceiling has been removed, revealing a somewhat elegant tongue and groove wood ceiling. Thirteen square wooden columns at regular intervals, support the 12' high ceilings on the first three floors. The second, third, and fourth floors instantly recreate a turn-of-the-century factory atmosphere, retaining almost all of the original features - the large open space, original windows, four inch thick tongue and groove wood and plank floors which also serve as the ceilings for the stories below. The original stairwell and possibly the original elevator connect the floors. The well-worn wooden steps offer mute testimony to the daily routine of hundreds of workers here.

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/ 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 1891 **Builder/Architect** L. H. Focht, Architect
George W. Beard, Builder

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Reading Knitting Mills is significant as the building which housed the hosiery manufacturer in Reading, often called "the full-fashioned hosiery capital of the nation." The company was founded in 1883, when the introduction of knitting machinery in this area was altering the way Americas' socks were made. The venture was completely successful; in one years time the work force jumped from 18 to 113. Two small factories (neither which remain) were soon outgrown, and in 1891, the Reading Knitting Mills established its permanent home on this site. Two of Reading's leading builders, architect L. H. Focht and contractor George W. Beard, were called in to erect the new factory, construction beginning in April, 1891. The mill was formally opened July 22, as hundreds of prominent businessman toured the new facility and praised its many modern conveniences. By this time, five other hosiery factories had been established to follow the Reading Knitting Mills' example, though the Reading Knitting Mills was still the leading local firm. In 1891, the company employed 300 hands with a peak-production of 800 dozen pairs of high-grade seamless stockings per day, with distribution throughout the nation.

The surrounding neighborhood at the time was a mixture of factories and homes, working class and elite. In approximately a one block radius of the knitting mills stood numerous mansions from the 1870's and 1880's and workers row homes from 1880's and 1890's, interspersed with light and heavy industries. Lauer's Park, one of the city's most elegant private parks, stood between two important industries - Lauer's Brewery and Rick Bros. Hardware Foundry.

Employee-employer relations inside the Reading Knitting Mills in 1891 also show the spirit of a different era. The employees, many of whom were young women living at home, were under the humanized, though paternalistic, influence of old-time local business customs. I. C. Hunnsicker an experienced hosiery man, was the manager and half-owner, while Mrs. Hunnsicker and Luther Gable (a future owner) ran the office.

"The employees are principally women who are experts, and learn the business in a very short time. They are neat, bright, intelligent, careful, and devoted to their work, and make good wages. Girls are paid by the piece, at the rate of 14 to 20 cents a dozen. A number make from \$8 to \$10 a week. There is usually some good-natured rivalry among the hands, and passers-by often hear the girls merrily singing their Sunday School hymns together while at work. The discipline in the factories is strict and is enforced by the forelady in charge of the department. Careless work is

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Reading Knitting Mills, Berks County



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

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the bane of the life of the hosiery department, but this is abated by docking those who are persistently guilty of it" (Reading Eagle Nov. 29, 1891).

At this time, the Reading Knitting Mills had encountered no labor difficulties and the various foreman and foreladies were remembered in Christmas gift exchanges with the mill workers. To show appreciation to their employees, the Reading Hosiery Manufacturers Association held their first annual hosiery festival in November, 1891. I. C. Hunnsicker organized the gala event, which entertained the workers and their relatives with congratulatory speeches, a dinner, and an employee-employers talent show. This expression of old-fashion hospitality was considered progressive by the National Hosiery News Journal, which recommended it to its manufacturer subscribers.

During the 1890's, the Reading Knitting Mills specialized in 84-needle hosiery, of which they became the nations' largest producer. The company kept an office in New York, to handle its growing sales to all parts of the U. S. and Australia. Production: 1,500 dozen pairs daily. A major addition to the factory was constructed in 1898. By this time the hosiery business was booming in Reading, the number of manufacturers growing from 6 in 1891 to 18 in 1898. In the next decade, the hosiery business continued to expand here; meanwhile the Reading Knitting Mills underwent several changes of ownership—the names figure only in the ranks of prominent local businessman. The company slipped to second place in the national production of 84-needle hosiery

The Reading Knitting Mills continued to prosper, however, as the addition of a 4th story was required. By atlases, this took place sometime between 1913 and 1931 (probably in the earlier part of this period). In 1923 the factory was sold and the name changed to F. Y. Kitzmiller Sons Company. Within a year, the new company went into receivership. By this time Reading had grown to be the nation's second largest hosiery production center. The number of hosiery mills in Berks County had mushroomed to 172, with a total investment of \$60,000,000. Probably the increased competition was responsible for the decline of the city's earliest hosiery firm. Factory operations continued into 1930, then the building stood vacant throughout the depression until occupied as a warehouse in 1941. Complete adaptive re-use of the building has been done by Fleetwood Industries, Inc., who manufacture and sell store fixtures in this authentic historical setting. The Reading Knitting Mills illustrates the typical rise and decline of an industry and also stands apart as the pioneer of Reading's renowned hosiery facilities and as a national leader in the production of its own specialty.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property .3

Quadrangle name Reading, PA

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A	18	4210	980	44	65	66	0
	Zone	Easting	Northing				

B							
	Zone	Easting	Northing				

C							
	Zone	Easting	Northing				

D							
	Zone	Easting	Northing				

E							
	Zone	Easting	Northing				

F							
	Zone	Easting	Northing				

G							
	Zone	Easting	Northing				

H							
	Zone	Easting	Northing				

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

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

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Irvin Rathman, Michel R. Lefevre

organization Planning Bureau, City Hall

date

street & number 8th & Washington Streets

telephone

city or town Reading

state Pennsylvania 19601

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

Larry E. Tise, Executive Director

title Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

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

Penn Title Insurance Company

RECEIVED

NOV 2 1980

PH. R. MC
Historic Preservation

DESCRIPTION OF PREMISES

No. 48898

PREMISES "A"

ALL THAT CERTAIN one and four story brick warehouse and lot or piece of ground on which the same is erected, situate on the southwest corner of North Fourth and Elm Streets, in the City of Reading, County of Berks and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, bounded:

On the North by said Elm Street; on the East by said North Fourth Street; on the South by property now or late of A. Harvey Tyson and on the West by a ten (10) feet wide alley.

CONTAINING in front along said North Fourth Street a width of one hundred and forty seven (147) feet, more or less, and in depth along said Elm Street ninety (90) feet, more or less.

PREMISES "B" - PURPART NO. 1

ALL THAT CERTAIN narrow strip or piece of ground, lying to the South of Elm Street, between North Fourth Street and Rose Street, in the City of Reading, County of Berks and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, more fully bounded and described as follows, to wit:

BEGINNING at a point on the division line between property now or late belonging to Miller Printing Company and property belonging to Jules B. Fromm and Sandra F. Berman, said place of beginning being Southward a distance of 25 feet from the Southerly building line of Elm Street, (60 feet wide as shown on the Topographical Survey of the City of Reading); thence from said place of beginning extending in a Southerly direction, along property of Jules B. Fromm and Sandra F. Berman, a distance of 122 feet to a point, the last described line being Eastwardly a distance of 120 feet from and parallel with the Easterly building line of Rose Street, (40 feet wide as shown on the aforesaid Topographical Survey); thence in a Westerly direction, along House No. 530 North Fourth Street, property now or late of Rosalie Mugar, forming an interior angle of 90 degrees 5 minutes 5 seconds with the last described line, a distance of 0.93 feet to a point; thence in a Northerly direction, along land now or late belonging to Miller Printing Company, forming an interior angle of 89 degrees 54 minutes 55 seconds with the last described line, a distance of 122 feet to a point; the last described line being 119.07 feet Eastwardly from and parallel with the Easterly building line of said Rose Street; thence in an Easterly direction, along land now or late belonging to Miller Printing Company, forming an interior angle of 90 degrees 5 minutes 5 seconds with the last described line, a distance of 0.93 feet to the place of beginning, the last described line being Southwardly a distance of 25 feet from and parallel with the Southerly building line of Elm Street, and forming an interior angle of 89 degrees 54 minutes 55 seconds with the first described line.

PURPART NO. 2

(DESCRIPTION OF BED OF 10' WIDE ALLEY SOUTH SIDE OF ELM STREET, BETWEEN FOURTH AND ROSE STREETS.) ALL THEIR RIGHTS, TITLE and INTERESTS IN ALL THAT CERTAIN strip or piece of ground, (being the bed of a former ten feet wide alley), situate on the southern side of Elm Street between North Fourth Street and Rose Street, in the City of Reading, County of Berks and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and more fully bounded and described as follows, to wit:

BEGINNING at a point on the Southern building line of Elm Street (60 feet wide as shown on the Topographical survey of the City of Reading), said point being a corner of property belonging to Miller Printing Company and also being a distance of 120.00 feet in an Easterly direction from the intersection of the Southern building line of Elm Street with the Eastern building line of Rose Street (40 feet wide as

Penn Title Insurance Company

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DESCRIPTION OF PREMISES

No. 48898

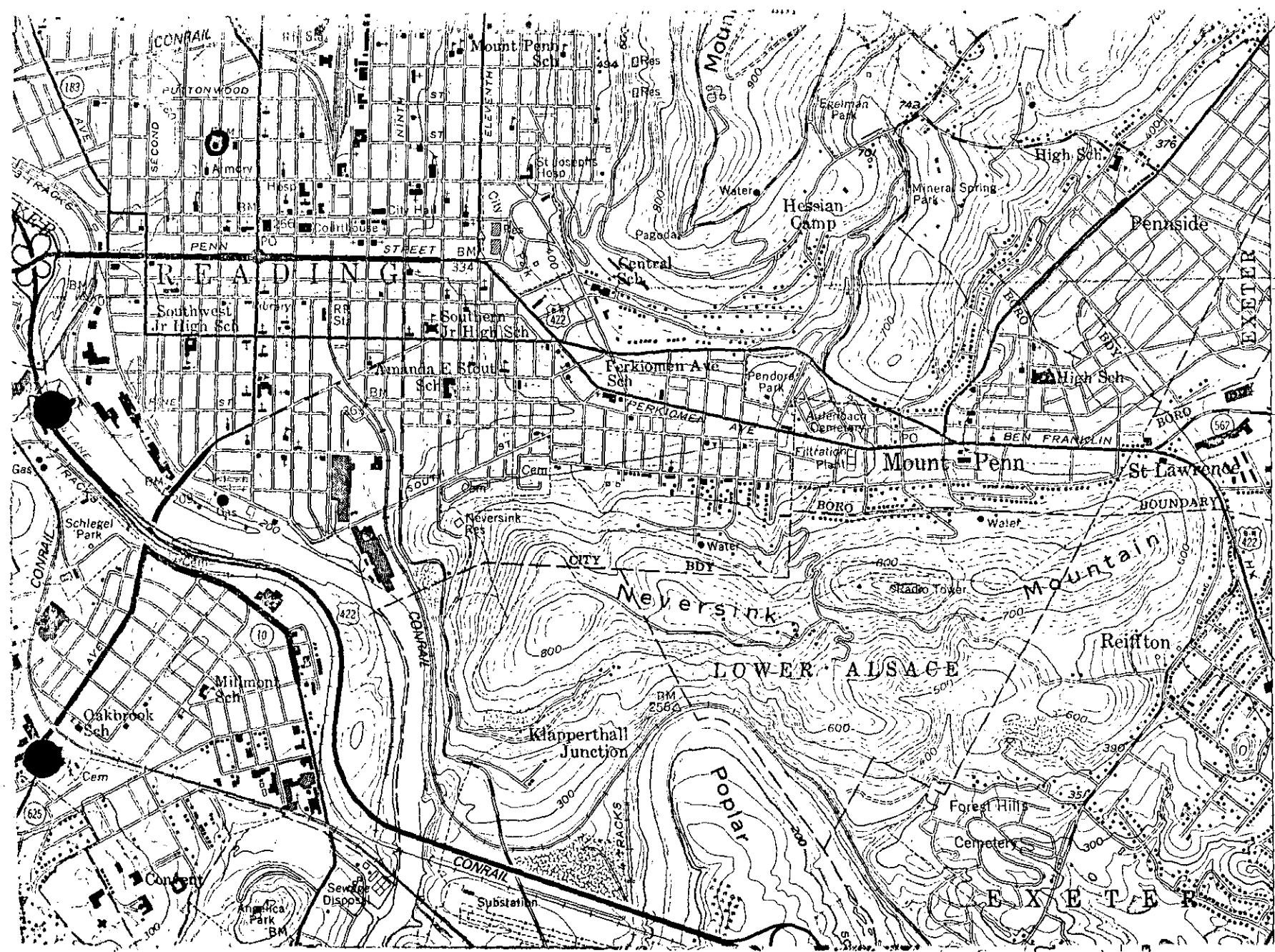
shown on the Topographical survey of the City of Reading), thence extending in an Easterly direction along the Southern building line of Elm Street, a distance of 10.00 feet to a point, thence leaving the Southern building line of Elm Street and extending in a Southerly direction along property belonging to Jules B. Fromm and Sandra F. Berman, forming an interior angle of 89 degrees 54 minutes 55 seconds with the Southern building line of Elm Street a distance of 147.00 feet to a point, thence extending in a Westerly direction along property belonging to Rosalie Mugar, upon which is erected House No. 530 North Fourth Street, forming an interior angle of 90 degrees 05 minutes 05 seconds, with the last described line a distance of 10.00 feet to a point a corner of property belonging to Miller Printing Company, thence extending in a Northerly direction along the same by a line being 120.00 feet Eastwardly from and parallel with the Eastern building line of Rose Street, forming an interior angle of 89 degrees 54 minutes 55 seconds with the last described line a distance of 147.00 feet to the place of beginning, the last described line forming an interior angle of 90 degrees 05 minutes 05 seconds with the Southern building line of Elm Street. The said interest of Miller Printing Company being conveyed to Peoples Printing Company as aforesaid.

PREMISES "A"

BEING the same premises which Hi-Fro Holding Co. (a foreign corporation of N.J.) by Deed dated April 13, 1965 and recorded in Berks County, in Deed Book 1463, page 1064, conveyed unto Jules B. Fromm and Sandra F. Berman, as tenants in common, in fee.

PREMISES "B" - PURPARTS #1 & #2

BEING the same premises which Peoples Printing Company (a Pa. Corp.) by Deed dated May 31, 1968 and recorded in Berks County, in Deed Book 1529, page 819, conveyed unto Jules B. Fromm and Sandra F. Berman, as tenants in common, in fee.



466
ST. LAWRENCE 0.6 MI.
BOYERTOWN 13 MI.
463
BAUMSTOWN 4.5 MI.
DOUGLASVILLE 9.2 MI.
(BIRDSBORO)
5864 IV SE