

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Keystone Hook and Ladder Company

and or common Keystone Fire House

2. Location

street & number Second and Penn Streets N/A not for publication

city, town Reading N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Berks code 101

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" 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	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input 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 Brian Schlappich / Heritage Investment Group

street & number 502 Walnut Street

city, town Reading N/A vicinity of state Pennsylvania

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Berks County Courthouse

street & number 33 North Sixth Street

city, town Reading state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Reading Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1978  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Pennsylvania Historical and 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

N/A

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Keystone Hook and Ladder Company stands at Second and Penn streets near one of the principal gateways to Reading, at the base of the Penn Street Bridge in the midst of what was the city's most industrialized portion. Built in the 1880s, at the height of Reading's industrial boom, the building conveys the optimism and vitality of its era. Its florid brick facade is capped by a wooden bell tower derived from the Queen Anne thus merging contemporary taste with the elaborate brickwork derived from German mid-century design and thus describes the nature of Reading's mixed ethnic heritage.

The firehouse is developed along lines that are conventional for the building type. The principal facade is penetrated by engine doors that open onto the major road access on Penn Street, and is capped by a belfry that proclaims the public character of the building, but also sounds the alarm to the surrounding volunteers who manned the firehouse. The second story is subdivided into thirds by pilaster strips carried on corbels that reiterated the wide, narrow, and wide pattern of doors of the first floor that conformed to the engine bays that flanked the stair corridor to the second floor. High windows, well above street level and joined by a pressed brick beltcourse, presumably described the position of the horse stalls. These uses of space on the first floor were changed in the twentieth century when larger fire engines required a single oversized central opening. The pilasters and window openings of the the second story also describe the arrangement of interior space. The tall double-hung Queen Anne sash, bordered by small panes of colored glass denote the principal front room of the second floor. The central pilaster strips rise up the gable to form the base of the tower, but also refer to the position of the central stair landing -- which is also further located by the gable, carried on similar pilaster strips on the side elevation. The subdivision of the side wall into thirds also reflects the position of the rooms which housed firemen. The entire upper level is capped by an elaborate brick cornice that is interrupted by the projecting corbel tables of the pilaster strips which are in turn accented with a wooded brick ornament and capped by an iron finial.

Rising above the building is the belfry which stands on a bracketed wood cornice of Italianate derivation. The tower, in more up to date fashion, is clad in oversized imbricated wood shingles that contrast with the plain surface of the window frames. Small gables above the windows are infilled with stick style trusses and form the transition to the pyramidal roof that caps the tower.

One additional feature of the exterior remains to be noted -- the two-story annex constructed at the rear of the building, probably as early as 1888 or 1890 and used by visual evidence for storage and perhaps, hose drying. That is articulated by three registers of windows, each spanned by segmental arches. The center window of the second story has a hoist above its arch, and originally was larger than the others of its level. It was presumably closed by a wood door.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Keystone Hook and Ladder Co. Item number 7

Page 2

The interior shows the impact of the change to larger engines in this century. The original first floor configuration has been changed to one large clear span space, and the walls have been sheathed in grooved pine that conceals but presumably did not replace the original molded brick cornice that is still visible at the south end of the room. In the center, the new ceiling shows the position of the original stair and the circular cutout for the fire pole, confirming the evidence of the plan of the second story. At the rear of the first floor, the annex has been incorporated into its space, by carrying the rear wall of the original fire house on an immense steel beam. That apparently occurred in the nineteenth century, at the time that the annex was added and explains the unusual second floor roof truss in the annex, that carries the weight of the roof to the ground. One final feature of the first floor is of note: the stair is probably reused from the original Queen Anne stair, but moved to a new position to provide access to the second floor when the fire engines took up the center of the space. It has a handsome Richardsonian newel that stands on a slight angle to the stairs. Massive overscaled turned balusters added to the character of the stair.

The second story layout is now compromised by the changed position of the stair, which instead of arriving in the central landing that provided access to the main front room, a side room, and the two rear rooms, now enters through the southeast room making it a passage that joins to the original stair landing which is also a passage. Otherwise the rooms remain in their original configuration and retain most of their trim and decorative features. Particularly noteworthy are two pairs of tall double doors of the main front room. They are paneled, with grooves in the raised panels and a large transom panel at the door head emphasizing the public scale and character of the space. Queen Ann moldings with small rosettes in the corners are typical of the period. The adjacent rooms though smaller are similarly detailed and survive essentially intact.

One final space remains -- the second floor of the rear annex. Its unplastered brick walls and exposed rafters make it clear that this was never more than storage space. It is of interest however from an engineering point of view for the enormous wood truss that takes the load of the roof and rafters off the rear wall of the original firehouse. Though merely a jury-rigged solution, it demonstrates the inventive nature of building construction at the end of the age of wood construction.

# 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1886 - 1887

Builder/Architect E.K. Mull, Architect

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Keystone Hook and Ladder Company is a handsome and well-preserved Queen Anne landmark at a major entry into downtown Reading. Erected in the 1880s, it marked the period of most rapid industrialization of Reading in the generation after the Civil War, when what had been a county seat broadened its economy to become a significant center of production. Though Reading had a volunteer fire system from the eighteenth century, this, and other contemporary firehouses from the 1880s indicate the impact of modern fire fighting technology, and city sponsored construction budgets on the old system of private volunteer companies and thus represents the development of modern municipal services. This is of particular note as a transitional building erected by community funds raised by neighborhood leaders who had the assurance that in the following year (1887) it would be purchased by the city. Finally, unlike the Hamden Fire Company, which was the design of a Philadelphia architect, E.F. Durang, the contemporary Keystone Hook and Ladder and the Marion Hose Company were commissioned from local designer, E.K Mull, (active circa 1880 - circa 1910) and thus describe the regional architectural achievements.

Though it is as architecture that the Keystone Hook and Ladder is most immediately perceived as having interest, its place in the development of municipal services is at least as significant. The history of fire fighting in Reading is ably discussed in Reading's Volunteer Fire Companies, (American Guide Series, Phila., 1938) which recounts the initial chartering of fire companies by region of the city. Keystone, for example, was chartered in 1855 as the "Hook and Ladder Company of Long Island", the name given the region along the east bank of the Schuylkill. Headed by community members, clubs were both functional and social, and competed in sporting events as well as the glitter and size of their fire engines. The first firehouse of the company, at Front and Penn streets, proved too small for the much heavier, modern, horse drawn steam pump acquired in the 1880s. At that time, the Reading Eagle was reporting on several other fire houses being erected with city funding, including Hamden Fire Company (14 October 1886), and the Marion Company (23 October 1886) with strict budgets being set by the city.

The city was unable to promise to pay for yet another company -- Keystone -- even though it had chartered the fire company to build a new building in the vicinity of Second and Penn in February of 1884. After a year of inaction, the local residents decided to raise their own funds which the city agreed to cover. A building committee was organized composed of William Mast, George W. Miller, J.C. Weidner, William W. Wunder, Edmund Yeager and Harry

(Continued)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Keystone Hook and Ladder Co. Item number 8

Page 2

Yeich. City directories indicate that these were businessmen in the immediate vicinity. Wunder, for example, was president of the club from 1885 - 1891, and was listed in the business directory as the proprietor of the Reading Fire Apparatus Works -- which built "Chemical Engines, Hose Carriages, and Hook and Ladder Trucks". Weidner was a local stone cutter; Miller sold flour and feed at 130 Penn Street and the Yeich family had a grocery store and plumbing business at 133 Penn Street.

Mast, Yeich and Samuel Weitzel purchased the property in the fall of 1886; shortly afterwards, the Reading Eagle reported that architect E.K. Mull had been directed by the city to modify the Marion Fire Company plans, presumably for the use of the Keystone Company, and then the city accepted the plans and specifications. Eight months later, in 7 June 1887, the firehouse was occupied. With this, Marion, Hamden, and Liberty Hose No. 5, the beginning of municipal operation of the fire department was well underway. Contemporary accounts of the new city hall, post office, and public schools suggest that this marks the maturing of Reading as a modern municipality.

On the other hand, as described earlier the Keystone Hook and Ladder is also a handsome work of architecture by a local designer known for his fire houses. Though modified in 1935 to provide access for a still larger fire engine, the principal features of Mull's design remain intact. This is of note because it tends to confirm hypotheses about a regional architectural interest in styles derived, not just from Ruskin's England, but also from mid-century Germany, which was then being extensively published in architectural journals. Those styles were characterized by monochromatic brick work in contrast with Ruskin's preferred polychromy, and followed the Germans in the elaborate framing and accents of openings by moldings and bands, and the subdivision of walls by raised corbelled pilasters. These styles are common in sections of North Philadelphia where Germans were concentrated and in several towns of Upper Montgomery County, and were also apparent in Berks County as Mull's and Durang's work demonstrates.

As a landmark in the development of Reading's municipal services created by its neighbors who were often notable industrialists and merchants, and as a work of architecture by local architect, E.K. Mull, the Keystone Hook and Ladder Company deserves to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Attached Sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1/10

Quadrangle name Reading

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	4	2	0	7	0	0	4	4	6	5	1	4	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 Attached Sheet

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A  
state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title George E. Thomas, Ph.D.  
organization Clio Group, Inc. date July 12, 1985  
street & number 3961 Baltimore Avenue telephone (215) 386 - 6276  
city or town Philadelphia 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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Dr. Larry E. Tise, State 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

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

Continuation sheet Keystone Hook and Ladder Co. Item number 9

Page 1

Bibliography:

Albright, Raymond. Two Centuries of Reading, Pa. Reading, 1948  
pp. 223 - 25.

Reading's Volunteer Fire Companies. Phila.: American Guide Series, 1938.

The Reading Eagle. 14 October, 1884; 23 October 1886; 15 November 1886.

Atlases:

Forsey, Briou & Co. Atlas of the City of Reading, Reading: 1884.

Sanborn Map Co., Insurance Maps of Reading, Pa., Vol. I. New York: 1933.

Smith, Elvino C.E. Atlas of the City of Reading, Pa., Phila.: 1913.

Reading Department of Records, 1886 - 17-252; 1887 - 176-307.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet    Keystone Hook and Ladder Co    Item number    10

Page    1

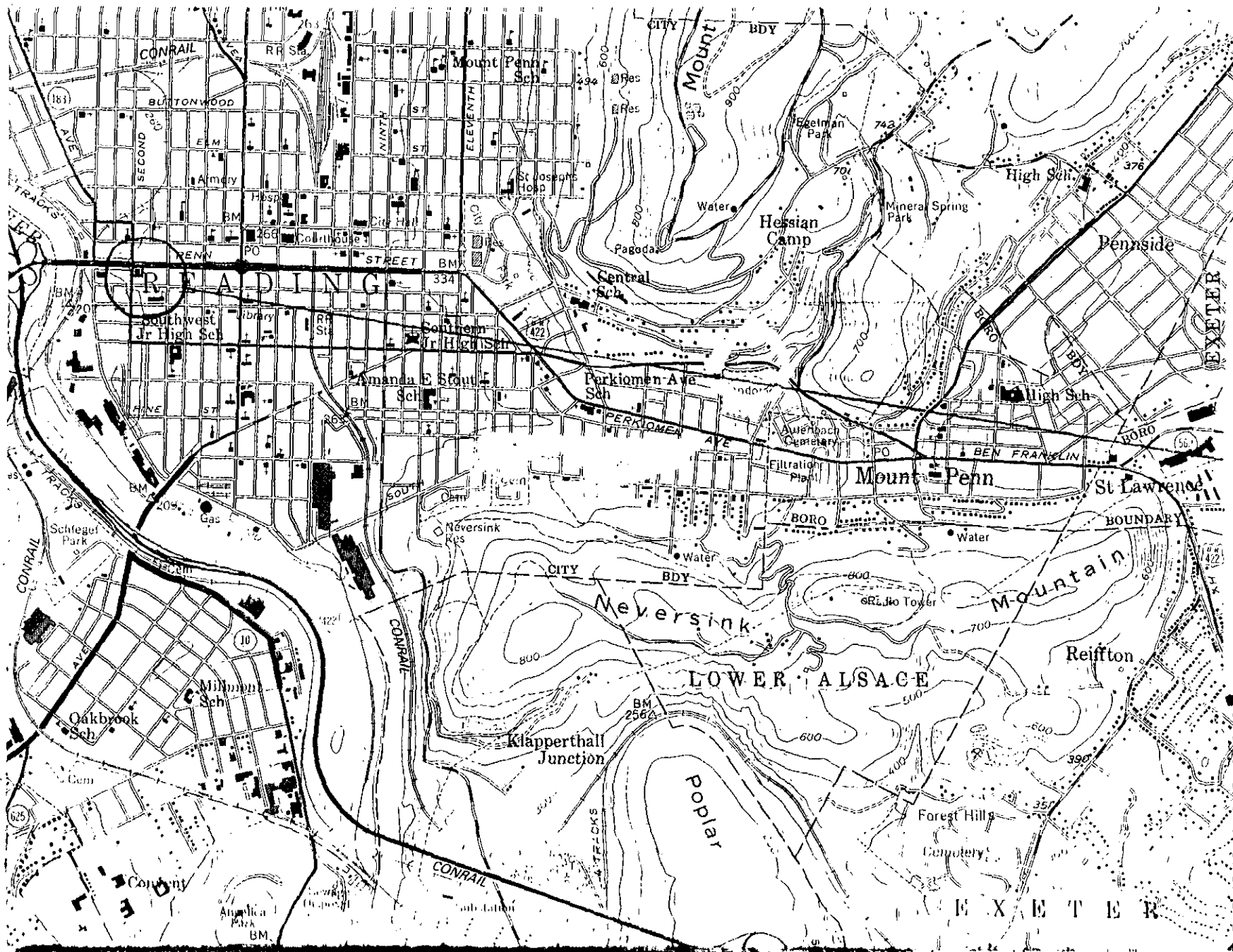
**Boundary Description:**

From the intersection of Penn and Second streets the property extends east 34 feet, then south parallel to Second Street 110 feet, then west, 34 feet to Second Street, then north 110 feet to the point of origin at Penn and Second streets.

**Boundary Justification:**

The entire property is occupied by the firehouse.





466

STONE HOOK AND LADDER  
 COMPANY  
 Berks County  
 Reading Quadrangle  
 Zone 18  
 E420700 N4465140

463

35 A1-985  
 (BORO DESCRIB)