

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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 Cotton and Maple Streets School

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number Cotton and Maple Streets N/A not for publication

city, town Reading N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 042 county Berks code 011

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input 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	<b>Public Acquisition.</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted.	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<u>N/A</u> 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: club

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 6th Street

city, town Reading state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Comprehensive Historic Sites Survey for the City of Reading has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1978  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records City of Reading, Bur. of Planning / PA. Hist. & Mus. Commission

city, town Reading / Harrisburg state Pennsylvania

# 7. Descripti

### Condition

- excellent
- good
- fair

- deteriorated
- ruins
- unexposed

### Check one

- unaltered
- altered

### Check one

- original site
- moved

N/A

date

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

The Cotton and Maple Street Public School stands near the crest of a hill, in ethnic South Reading a region that was undergoing industrialization in the early twentieth century. Its forceful architectural character is derived from architect Hiram S. Head's ability to skillfully integrate Italianate details with the scale and mass of the Richardsonian Romanesque in a regional palette of materials -- brick and red sandstone. The building itself is derived in plan from ideas about schools that dated back to the mid-nineteenth century, with separate entrances on either side for boys and girls. Large, dividable classrooms are served by a rear service wing containing stairs, restrooms and circulation that gave the building considerable spatial clarity. In addition to mid-century notions of school plan, the Cotton and Maple School shows characteristics of contemporary industrial design in its rectangular brick mass fenestrated by large windows.

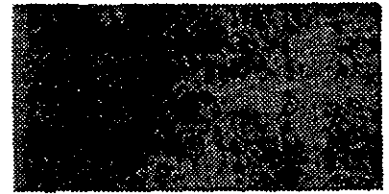
The use of space is communicated by the clear cubic composition which the architect overlaid with forms that merge the details of the Italianate with the public scale of Richardson's work of the previous generation. The functions of each zone are apparent by position and size. The single rectangular volume of the classroom block is subdivided into two stories and further divided by a broad central brick pier that marks the two rooms of each floor. The entrances on each side provide access to the street and the playground, and lead into the circulation service core that exists as a separate volume at the rear.

The facade is similarly ordered. The sloping hill side of the site is resolved by a coursed, quarry-faced ashlar brownstone base that projects out around the side entrance and is almost a full story out of the ground on the northwest corner. It terminates on the south side toward the playground making it apparent that it is more decorative than structural and simply establishes a visual base. The basement windows have been infilled, but the original openings can be restored. The base is capped by a smooth dressed course that also forms the sills of the first floor windows, and the springing point of the stilted arches over the boys and girls doors. The walls rise in crisp, deep orange brick, interrupted by the brownstone sills of the second story windows, and the projecting beltcourse that joins the brick framed round heads of the upper windows. Overscaled dentils support the overhanging eave which in turn carries a hipped, slate roof interrupted by similarly hipped dormers.

The interior is essentially what the outside indicates. Each story now has one large room entered from the stair hall by two arched openings on either side of the chimney mass. That mass projects into the classroom and marks the point where the room originally had been subdivided. Tongue and groove wainscoting (originally varnished) protects the lower wall surfaces; above, plaster walls rise to a flat, plastered ceiling (now covered with acoustical ceiling on wooden furring strips). Windows, currently boarded on the exterior, are one-over-one, double hung with wood sash and frames.

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The service tower is essentially devoted to circulation, with a double stair meeting at a central landing. The stair and halls show the same basic materials as the school rooms -- wood wainscoting, plaster walls, and Italianate door surrounds. On either side, at the head of the stairs are small toilet rooms. The landing itself is lighted by large fanlighted windows that are the principal features of the three facades of the service wing, and reiterate the shape of the fanlights above the door that still survives at the lower playground entrance. Despite its later use as a club, or perhaps because of it, the school remains in nearly original condition.

# 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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 1902-03

Builder/Architect Hiram S. Head, Arch.; Geo. Meinholz, Bldr.

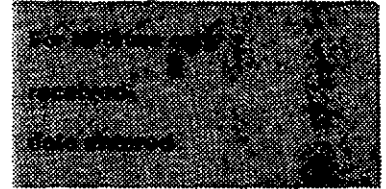
## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Cotton and Maple Streets School is a handsome neighborhood school house built during the years around 1900 when the city of Reading underwent its first round of significant municipal improvements. Beginning with fire houses and police stations around 1890 and including new postal offices and government offices in the 1890s, that movement was focused on school buildings by the turn of the century. Early in the twentieth century, a new Boys High School was erected in downtown Reading with numerous smaller schools being constructed in the neighborhoods. Interestingly, these smaller buildings took many of the same motifs, establishing a strong, systemwide identity for the city's school buildings. This visual identity largely can be explained by the fact that a very small group of architects designed the new neighborhood schools of the period and that their plans all faced the same members of the school board for approval. In addition to local reinforcement of the style, the form and details of the Reading schools reflect design trends for this building type in other cities at the turn of the century. Finally, the building is the work of a regional school architect, Hiram S. Head, who designed other neighborhood school buildings in the system of which this is the best preserved survivor. (Minutes of the Reading School Board, 1900-1919, passim.)

The decision to build a new school in Reading's south side was made in the spring of 1901 when the school board voted to buy the lot at Cotton and Maple streets. School records and the Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide make it clear that this was done as part of a period of significant construction and growth with new schools at Madison and Elm (designed by George Gerhard, 1900, much altered) in the 13th Ward; in the 9th Ward (by Hiram S. Head); and another on Windsor Street (also by Head, and essentially demolished) all under contract by 1902 and the National Register-listed stone, Beaux Arts-style Boys High School (reused as Reading City Hall), by Philadelphians Paul Davis and Seymour Davis. Presumably, it was the civic, centrally located Boys School that caused Reading to look to southeast Pennsylvania's best known school architects. They designed a handsome stone building whose scale and more formal Beaux Arts style were appropriate to its downtown location. The neighborhood schools on the other hand were the work of local architects, generally Hiram Head, who developed the distinctive character of the neighborhood satellite schools. Whether the choice of Richardsonian proportions on a brick field with Italianate motifs was conscious or merely the result of such forms becoming vernacular is not clear from school minutes. But, the effect of such a consistent building design was to emphasize the unity of the school system. The need for such a system was great, for by 1900 some 11,000 pupils were enrolled in buildings that frequently dated back to the old private school system of the early nineteenth century (Minutes of the Reading School Board, 1905).

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According to the Elvino Smith Atlas of the City of Reading, 1913, the neighborhood in which the Cotton and Maple Streets School was erected was already extensively built with larger mills interspersed with rows of workers' houses. To the east at 9th and Cotton streets, and presumably giving the street its name was the Reading Cotton Mill. The Reading Glove Mitten Manufacturing Co., and the Troy Laundry were also in the area and suggest the causes of the growth of the region. It is significant that none of these businesses and very few rowhouses were in the area when the 1884 atlas was prepared. But, by 1933 when the Sanborn Company surveyed the area, it was evolving into an ethnic community, with an Italian "Assemblea Christiana" church across the street from the school and St. John's German Lutheran Church at 12th and Cotton.

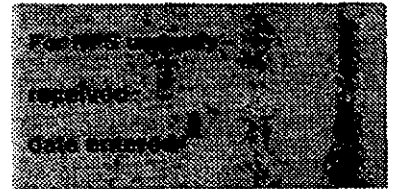
Fortunately, the building that represents these various urban forces is a handsomely proportioned design by one of the principal city architects, Hiram S. Head. Head appears in Reading city directories as early as the 1880s and by 1900 was one of only seven listed architects. Head was also mentioned regularly in the Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, in its "Out of Town Column". He designed the schools at Tenth and Green streets, the Windsor Street School, the Ninth Ward School, and the Cotton and Maple Streets School. Judging by his work at the Hill School, one of the region's best known private institutions in nearby Pottstown, Head was an accomplished designer whose work represented the norms of design in a building that by style and form is characteristic of its era.

The style and form of the school houses, which once appeared in abundance throughout Reading, have nearly vanished from the city's streetscapes; as functional and physical obsolescence demanded demolition of the old turn-of-the-century four to eight-room schoolhouses, larger modern facilities took their place as early as the 1920s. Some of the Victorian schoolhouses were given to other uses, such as the Cotton and Maple School which became a clubhouse in the 1940s. But, of the thirty-four schools erected in Reading during the pre-World War I era, only six have survived in any form and of these, only three with a reasonable degree of integrity. The Schuylkill Avenue and W. Elm Street School (1880s) long since has been stuccoed and altered considerably for a Baptist Church (photo 1). The Elm and Madison School (1900) designed by George Gerhard has suffered a radical loss of integrity in its conversion to a city storage facility; these changes include insertion of garage doors and infill of windows at the first floor (photo 2). The Twelfth and Windsor School (1902) designed by H.S. Head was demolished except for its rusticated brownstone foundation upon which a post office was built at mid-century (photo 3). Reading's three well-preserved remaining schoolhouses are the Douglas and Weiser (Charles Foos) School, the Cotton and Maple School, and the Beaux Arts-style Boys High School. The latter, of a different scale and style, and designed by non-Reading architects, survived as Reading's City

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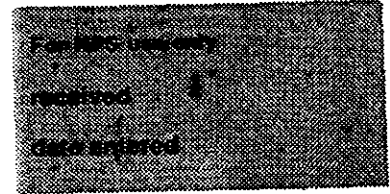
3

Hall. The Douglas and Weiser School, built in 1903 by H.S. Head, originally was similar in style to his design for the Cotton and Maple School of the same year, but it was much larger than the small neighborhood elementary school at Cotton and Maple. The Douglas and Weiser School was significantly altered in 1912 when architect Edward Scholl designed a major Classical Revival addition that masked the building's original size and altered the old Richardsonian-style school to match the new Classical Revival building (photos 4, 4a.). As such, the Cotton and Maple School stands as the best preserved school by Hiram S. Head, and as a representative example of the turn-of-the-century schoolhouse in industrial Reading.

As a representative building of a type that once dotted industrial American cities and flourished in Reading, and as a handsome and well-preserved design that commemorates a prolific Reading school architect, the Cotton and Maple School warrants listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

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Minutes of the Reading School Board, 1905. Reading, PA, 1905.  
p. 70.

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Atlases:

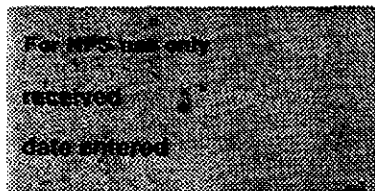
Forsey, Briou & Co. Atlas of the City of Reading. Reading: 1884.

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.

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**Boundary Description:**

The property extends west 80 feet along Cotton Street, then south 110 feet to Rambo Alley, then east 80 feet to Maple Street, then north, 110 feet to the intersection of Cotton.

**Boundary Justification:**

This is the property acquired by the school board in 1901, and contains the school building and its small yard.



# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Attached.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1/5 acre

Quadrangle name Reading

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	4	2	2	0	2	0	4	4	6	4	3	9	0
Zone		Easting					Northing							

B 

Zone		Easting					Northing							

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Zone		Easting					Northing							

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F 

Zone		Easting					Northing							

G 

Zone		Easting					Northing							

H 

Zone		Easting					Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

See Attached.

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

state PA 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 7/12/85; revised 12/9/85;  
3/20/86

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. Fise, State Historic Preservation Officer

date

For NPS use only

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

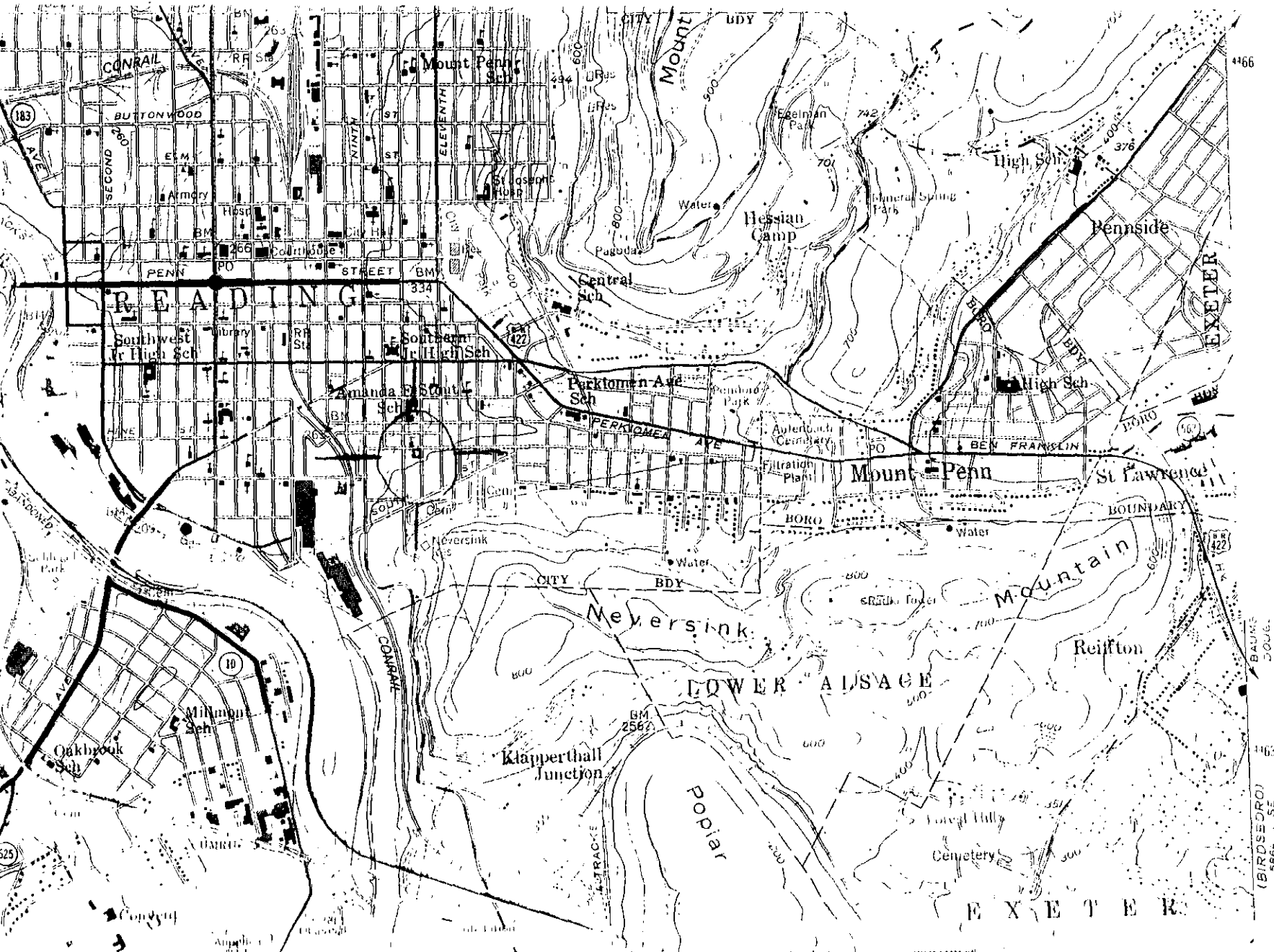
date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration



COTTON AND MAPLE STREET SCHOOLS  
 Berks County  
 Reading Quadrangle  
 Zone 18  
 E422020 N4464390

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