

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

For HCRS 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 Stirling

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number 1120 Centre Avenue

\_\_\_ not for publication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 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	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 Miss Gertrude Sternbergh

street & number 1120 Centre Avenue

city, town Reading

\_\_\_ 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 Historic Sites Survey

has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

date 1978

\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Reading Planning Commission, City Hall, 8th & Washington Sts.

city, town Reading

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

One of Berks County's last great private residences, "Stirling" is a 24 room chateausque-styled mansion designed by Harvard-educated American architect, Theophilus P. Chandler (1845-1928). Construction on this great stone mansion began in 1890 and was completed in 1892. "Stirling" was designed and built for James Hervey Sternbergh, a Reading iron and steel magnate, on five finely landscaped acres enclosed on three sides by tall wrought iron fencing and on the fourth by large evergreens and shrubs. The mansion, together with a large Tudor-style carriage house and a frame tenants' house, is bounded by Centre Avenue and Marion, Front, and Robeson Streets.

The exterior of this impressive chateausque mansion is constructed of squared natural granite ashlar with macaroni pointing, and decorated with heavy stone coursing, smoothly finished thick stone window tracing, gargoyles, and delicate floriform carvings. The floorplan is asymmetrical, a common but important element of the chateausque style which was popular in America between 1880 and 1905. "Stirling's" architectural elements--universally characteristic of this eclectic style--include tall joined chimneys with decorated caps, a balustraded veranda, steeply pitched gable roofs, decorated parapets, corbelled cornices, parapets with balustrades, small decorated roof dormers, and Gothic-styled finials. An ornamental stone crest, inscribed "Stirling/1892," is centered in a narrow gable end overlooking the balustraded terrace. The mansion's style is incorporated with elements common to the Gothic style and it is massive and irregular in silhouette.

The window apertures of "Stirling" are irregularly placed, but are symmetrical in features which are themselves symmetrical, such as the projecting two-story bays and large rounded projection on the building's eastern end. The structure contains several porches, balconies, and an arcaded porte-cochere.

The interior of "Stirling" conveys the same grandeur evidenced by its exterior; the magnificent major spaces are decorated with large mantles, chandeliers and sconces, frescoes, stained glass panels, and fine hardwood trim in a Gothic-Renaissance transitional mode. The ceilings in every room (including the second floor bedrooms and suites) are all hand painted with various floral motifs and ornamental decorations.

The first floor contains several large living rooms in addition to a long open receiving hall which spans the width of the mansion from the entrance at the porte-cochere (on the western end) to the entry way at the balustraded veranda (at the eastern end). The receiving hall, with a built-in mantle/setee arrangement in massive woodwork, opens--through pillars--on the southern side to a large drawing room dominated by a grand open staircase which is backdropped by a large semi-circular stained glass window and a mythological winged-female figure scone. The three story open staircase, whose bennister is carbed with a pillar and arch motif, leads to an open gallery on the second and third floors. A skylight is located directly above the staircase in the ceiling of the third floor. In the drawing room, a massive stone and wooden mantelpiece with columns and ionic capitals stands opposite the staircase and a great chandelier hangs in the center of the large room. The doorways in this room--as in the others on this floor--are topped with massive segmental pediments.

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Located to the north of the receiving hall and drawing room is a smaller sitting room whose eastern end is semi-circular. It is decorated with hand-finished plaster relief moldings and contains a large tiled fireplace whose woodwork is heavily carbed with ornamental flourishing surrounding a magnificent lion's head in the center. A crystal chandelier, with matching sconces, dominates this room. Adjoining the sitting room (to the west) is a small family dining room containing a massive fireplace and mantle and a leaded slag glass dome. Behind this dining room (to the north) is a small service kitchen noted for its series of four brilliantly stained and intricately leaded glass windows.

The suite of rooms located on the opposite (or southern) side of the receiving hall and drawing room include the music room whose white mahogany woodwork is carved with rosettes. The tiled fireplace is also encased in white mahogany which is carbed with a variety of musical instruments. This room also contains a crystal chandelier. A second dining room adjoining the music room (to the north) once served as the family library and is inset with finely crafted bookcases, small stained glass panels, and a massive mantelpiece above the tiled fireplace. A small "pullman" kitchen serves this particular dining room.

The second floor of "Stirling" contains a series of large bedrooms and studies and a childrens' nursery. The decorations--including hand-painted ceilings, elaborate lighting devices, decorative tilework, and other magnificent accoutrements--reflects the exuberance and oppulence of the major rooms on the first floor. It is obvious that little expense was spared in either the design and decorating of "Stirling" by the architect-client team of Theophilus P. Chandler and James Hervey Sternbergh.

The third floor contains several bedrooms and a trunk room. Steps lead from the trunk room to an unfinished storage attic in the steep gable roofs. The third floor balconies on the mansion's eastern end are located off the bedrooms and above a projecting two story bay.

"Stirling" is one of the finest examples of chateausque style architecture in Berks County, if not Eastern Pennsylvania. It was named after Stirling Castle in Scotland which was given its original name for the splendid view in commanded.

In addition to the mansion, a Tudor-styled carriage house of squared and coursed stone (on the first floor) and stucco and half timbering (on the second) is located in the south east corner of the city block on which "Stirling" stands. Behind the carriage house (to the south) is a two and a half-story frame tenants' house erected prior to the mansion, probably about 1870.

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Improvements to the mansion have been few and those that have been executed since its original construction have been done so with great care and caution in order to protect not only the original design, but the historic fabric and individual components as well. The only rooms that have been modernized are the kitchens and the six baths, and the three powder rooms, but original tile designs and woodwork have been carefully matched and, in some cases, duplicated by local craftsmen. Miss Gertrude Sternbergh, daughter of the Reading executive who commissioned this great house, is firmly dedicated to maintaining the character of "Stirling." In fact, the owner has recently undertaken the restoration of the hand painted ceilings in each room, and undertaking which demands considerable expertise as well as expense.

On the basis of its eclectic design, the art of its well-known architect, and the integrity it evidences through its unaltered elements, "Stirling" possesses the character necessary for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

# 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" 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** 1890-1892 **Builder/Architect** Theophilus P. Chandler

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Erected in 1890-1892 in what was at that time considered the far suburbs of the City of Reading, "Stirling" is the culmination of architect-client team work by Theophilus P. Chandler and James Hervey Sternbergh. The mansion occupies an entire city block once known (circa 1884) as "Hertwig Family Park." "Stirling" is an excellent example of architect-client design work as introduced in the previous decade by William Morris Hunt who worked with William K. Vanderbilt to design the Vanderbilt House on New York's luxurious Fifth Avenue. The Sternbergh mansion, similar in architectural elements to the Vanderbilt House, has been described as palatial and commands much attention because of its splendid eclectic style and its accompanying exuberant details and flourishes. Its massing and spirited design components lend themselves well to create one of the finest 19th century mansions in the City of Reading. It has, for many years, loomed as a landmark familiar to Reading's populace.

Theophilus P. Chandler, nationally recognized architect and designer for this magnificent building, was born in Boston in 1845, educated at Harvard, and studied architecture at the Atlier Vaudremer, Paris. He returned to Boston in 1870 and opened an office, but later moved to Philadelphia where he practiced for many years before retiring to his home at Ithan, Delaware County. Chandler was an early member and Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and was an organizer and first director of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Architecture. During his most active years, Theophilus P. Chandler planned some commerical buildings and a number of residences, but he was better known in the field of church design. His most ecclesiastical buildings in Philadelphia were the Swedenborgian Church at Chestnut and 22nd Streets, and the Bethlehem Presbyterian Church on Broad Street. Other churches designed by Chandler include the First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, and St. Thomas' Church in Washington, D.C. He also designed the John Wanamaker residence (entered in the National Register of Historic Places) and the Liverpool, London, & Globe Insurance Building, both in Philadelphia.

At the age of 56, James Hervey Sternbergh commissioned Chandler to design and construct his palatial mansion along the broad avenue which was commonly called "mansion row." The house reflects Sternbergh's tremendous financial successes, entrepreneurial skills, and business acumen. Only a very prosperous citizen of Reading could have afforded to purchase such fine land, engage a well-known architect, and built a 24 room house with exquisite interior decoration which includes hand-painted ceilings, magnificent hardwoods, chandeliers, stained glass windows and panels, and other decorative period elements. James Hervey Sternbergh settled in Reading in 1865 where he established an iron and rolling mill for the manufacture of nuts, bolts, rivets, and washers. An inventor at heart, Sternbergh in 1867 designed and patented a machine for making hot pressed nuts which remained in demand and popular at least through the opening decade of the 20th century.

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He also invented a superior grinding machine for grinding hard metals more effectively than in the past and at a much cheaper cost. Sternbergh's products and machinery won him many accolades; his articles were awarded medals at the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876, at the Chicago Exposition in 1883, at the New Orleans Exposition in 1885, at the Paris Exposition in 1889, and at the Columbian Exposition in 1893. In addition to his many manufacturing interests (Reading Nut and Bolt Works, J. H. Sternbergh & Son, Pennsylvania Nut and Bolt Company, the American Iron and Steel Manufacturing Company), Sternbergh was active in the Reading business community and served as a director in the Second National Bank of Reading and the Reading Trust Company. He was a founder and first president of the Reading Board of Trade and was a founder of Reading's Young Men's Christian Association. His civic and social interests were many.

Through careful maintenance by the Sternbergh family, most especially James Hervey Sternbergh's daughter, Gertrude (who was born in the mansion), "Stirling" remains much the same way as originally built. Its distinct architectural character pervades each room and every major space yields a period ambience which can only be conveyed by the best in interior design and ornamentation. The mansion was built with great expertise but it is conserved and kept in fine repair by its present owner who remains dedicated to preserving this handsome and rare chateausque mansion. Relatively few American examples of large chateausque styled residences exist since its style and decoration were only applicalbe to very pretentious residences.



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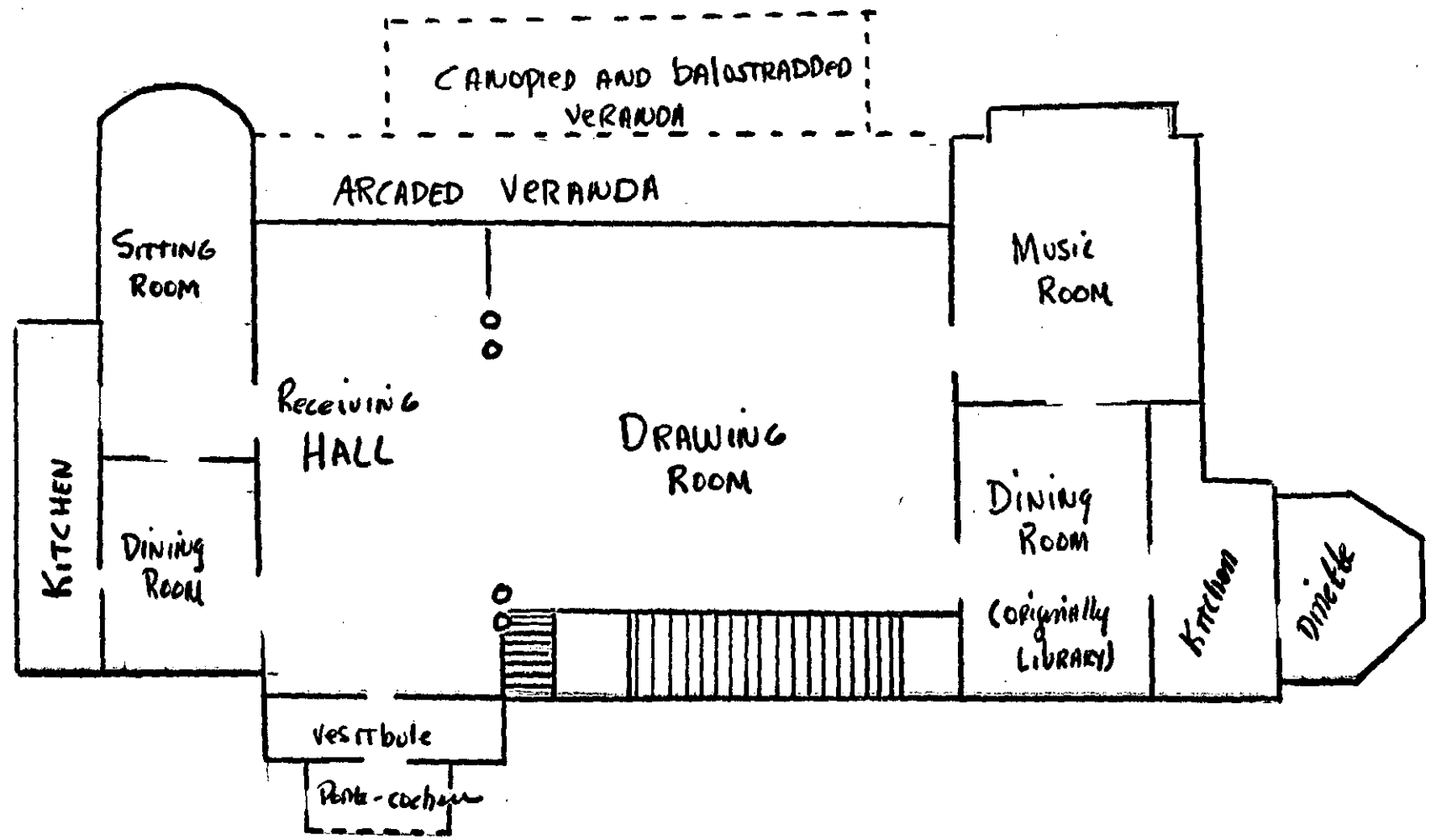
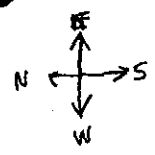
ITEM NUMBER 9

PAGE 2

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# 1<sup>ST</sup> floor plan for "Stirling", Reading, Berks County.

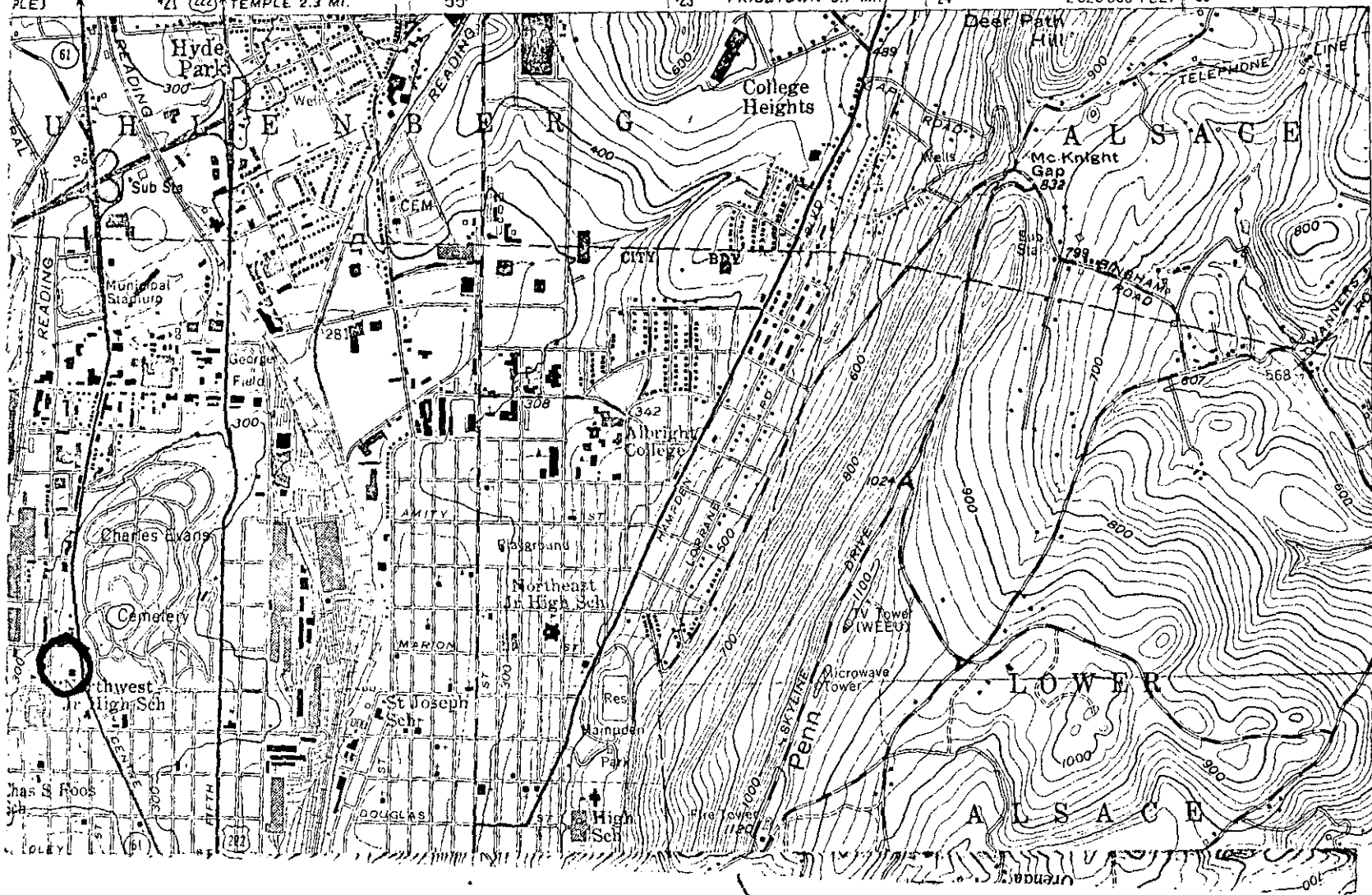


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 PENNSYLVANIA—BERKS CO.  
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3884 IV NE  
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15.9 MI.  
 2.1 MI.  
 YNW  
 PLEJ

421 222 MOSLEM SPRINGS 10 MI. TEMPLE 2.3 MI. 55' 423 PRICETOWN 5.7 MI. 424 2520 000 FEET 425 75°52'30" 40°22'30"



123

380 000  
 FEET

LY CREEK MILLS 0.4 MI.  
 DENSBURG 5.7 MI.