

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED

JUL 23 1979

SEP 12 1979

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Sayre and Fisher Reading Room, (Sayreville Hall)

AND/OR COMMON

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER Northeast corner Main Street and River Road

CITY, TOWN

Sayreville

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

15th

STATE

New Jersey

CODE

34

COUNTY

Middlesex

CODE

023

**CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY**

\_\_\_ DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

\_\_\_ STRUCTURE

\_\_\_ SITE

\_\_\_ OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

\_\_\_ PUBLIC

PRIVATE

\_\_\_ BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

\_\_\_ IN PROCESS

\_\_\_ BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

OCCUPIED

\_\_\_ UNOCCUPIED

\_\_\_ WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_\_ YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_\_ NO

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_\_ AGRICULTURE

\_\_\_ COMMERCIAL

\_\_\_ EDUCATIONAL

\_\_\_ ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_\_ GOVERNMENT

\_\_\_ INDUSTRIAL

\_\_\_ MILITARY

\_\_\_ MUSEUM

\_\_\_ PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_\_ RELIGIOUS

\_\_\_ SCIENTIFIC

\_\_\_ TRANSPORTATION

\_\_\_ OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Joseph and Stella Nieminski

STREET & NUMBER

190 Pulaski Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Sayreville

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

New Jersey 08872

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Middlesex County Administration Building

STREET & NUMBER

John F. Kennedy Square

CITY, TOWN

New Brunswick

STATE

New Jersey

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Middlesex County Inventory of Historical and Architectural Resources

DATE

1979

\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE  COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission

CITY, TOWN

841 Georges Road, North Brunswick

STATE

New Jersey

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Sayre and Fisher Reading Room is a 2-story rectangular building 8 bays long with a 3-bay facade. It is constructed of pressed and common brick with a gabled, slate roof. Four chimneys rise from the west wall, three original and one a later addition. Aside from two small, one-story sheds attached to the same wall, this chimney is the sole exterior alteration.

The windows on the long sides of the building are large-paned sash with segmental brick arches. The facade windows are round-arched, multi-paned casements with wood frames. The ground-floor facade windows are given separate transoms to match the round-arched, single-leaf door. The facade is treated as three separate areas by a molded brick "cornice" dividing the first and second floors, and a brick stringcourse which gives the gable a superficially pedimented appearance enhanced by the deeply-projecting eaves.

Although the facade is symmetrical, its decoration might be termed picturesque as well. Cream and terra cotta-color brick and terra cotta are used in both glossy and matte finishes. The central feature of the gable area is a large panel composed of brick and terra cotta. An oval shape bears the legend "Reading Room" and "Sayreville Hall" separated by a large and ornate SF monogram. The oval is framed by a rectangle, the four corners of which hold the numerals which compose the date, "1883". This decorative panel is surrounded by small terra cotta plaques cast with quatrefoil and other geometric ornaments. Below this composition is a string course of vertically-set polygonal-shaped bricks, and all the openings are framed with contrasting-color bricks to produce an effect almost like quoining. Between and beneath the windows are diamond-shaped terra cotta plaques. In contrast to the vividly-decorated facade, the side walls are relieved only by a simple string course and segmental brick arches in a contrasting color.

According to local informants, the interior was originally divided into one large space with a small vestibule on the ground floor, and two rooms of similar but unequal size on the second floor, both with wooden floors. Both floors have for many years been divided into residential units.

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Sayre and Fisher Reading Room Sayreville  
Middlesex County, New Jersey

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CONTINUATION SHEET    DESCRIPTION    ITEM NUMBER    7    PAGE    2

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The building is in good condition, with only minor repointing needed in spots. A number of the side windows are boarded.

The Reading Room stands on a major local connector in a neighborhood which is largely residential. North of the building is the site of the vanished Sayre and Fisher General Store and Main Office, and beyond that some of the Sayre and Fisher clay banks.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

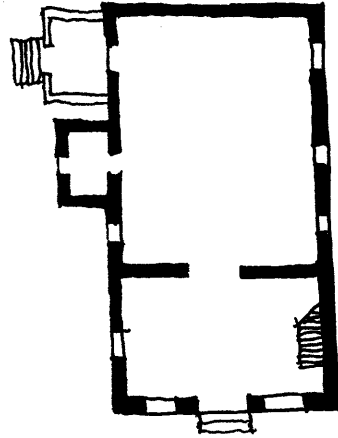
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Middlesex County, New Jersey  
Sayre and Fisher Reading Room  
Sayreville

CONTINUATION SHEET      Reading Room

ITEM NUMBER      7      PAGE      3

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# 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" 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

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Sayre and Fisher Reading Room is an expression of the paternalism of 19th-century employer-worker relations and a rare surviving remnant of one of the largest brick producers in the United States.

The Sayre and Fisher Company, founded about 1850, became one of the leading manufacturers of fire brick, enamel brick and ordinary building brick. In 1876, when Sayreville was named (after James R. Sayre, Jr., Peter Fisher's partner in the company) and incorporated as an independent township, it had no more than 100 residents in all of its fourteen square miles. The identities of the company and the township were already inseparable, however, and a large proportion of those residents were Sayre and Fisher employees.

By the time the Reading Room was built, in 1883, Sayre and Fisher produced more brick than any other manufacturer in the Middlesex County clay region. The company operated for the benefit of its workers a granary, bakery, slaughterhouse, coal yard, ice plant and general store, and for its own purposes, a machine shop and blacksmith shop. Company housing included row houses and more stylish double houses for the managerial class. It was in this context of industrial self-sufficiency in a community created almost entirely by a single force that the Reading Room served a double purpose: as a recreational outlet for Sayre and Fisher workers and as an advertisement for the decorative potential of the company's products.

The ground floor of the building was used for recreational activities, a kind of quasi-gymnasium, and the upper floor was used for meetings of fraternal orders (among them the Order of the Redmen) and other social purposes. It is not clear whether "Reading Room" was anything more than a genteelism like "Opera House," or whether books were actually available. It appears that the Reading Room was originally intended exclusively, or at least primarily, for the use of men; women seem to have socialized at home or at church in this workingclass society, although by about 1910 dances were held on the first floor.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Interview with Mr. Joseph Karcher, historian of Sayre and Fisher Company  
December, 1979.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1

QUADRANGLE NAME South Amboy

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES  
A 18 554660 4480040

B      
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property lies at the NE corner of Main Street and River Road and occupies Municipal Tax Block 175, lot 13.

## 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 Robert Guter, Associate Director

ORGANIZATION Heritage Studies, Inc.

DATE February, 1979

STREET & NUMBER RD #4, Box 864, Mapleton Road

TELEPHONE 609-452-1754

CITY OR TOWN Princeton

STATE New Jersey 08540

# 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.

Deputy

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER'S SIGNATURE

*Betty Wilson*

7-5-79

TITLE Deputy Commissioner, Department of Environmental Protection

DATE

## FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*Joseph Paul Shull*

DATE 9-12-79

ATTEST: *John A. Beebe*  
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE Sept 11, 1979

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CONTINUATION SHEET    SIGNIFICANCE    ITEM NUMBER    8    PAGE 2

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The second purpose of the Reading Room, its use as a kind of billboard for Sayre and Fisher products, can be appreciated by even a casual examination of the richly-decorated exterior. The facade is ornamented with polychrome brick and terra cotta; string courses, round-arched window heads, door and window surrounds, small inset plaques and the large date and name block at the gable apex.

The three original chimneys tower above the roof ridge, each ornamented in an entirely different manner.

Although brick and terra cotta manufacturing were the single most important 19th-century industry in Middlesex County, that fact would be difficult to deduce from the physical remains of the industries themselves. In Sayreville, a representative stock of worker housing can be found, but of all the buildings associated with the actual works, only a water tower, the ruins of a 20th-century power plant, a dilapidated mule stable, and the Sayre and Fisher Reading Room survive.