

# National Register of Historic Places

## United States Department of the Interior

### National Park Service

# Registration Form

### 1. Name of Property

historic name: Read School

other name/site number:

### 2. Location

street & number: 1670 Flat River Road

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Coventry vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Kent code: 003 zip code: 02816

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public-local

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: none

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Property name Read School, Kent County, Coventry, RI

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria.

     See continuation sheet.

Frederick C. Williamson

28 Jan 2002

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.

     See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

     entered in the National Register  
          See continuation sheet.

     determined eligible for the  
National Register  
     See continuation sheet.

     determined not eligible for the  
National Register

     removed from the National Register  
     other (explain):     

Signature of Keeper

Date  
of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: EDUCATION

Sub: school

Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: museum

Property name Read School, Kent County, Coventry, RI

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Greek Revival

Other Description:

Materials: foundation STONE roof ASPHALT  
walls WOOD/weatherboard other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):

Areas of Significance: EDUCATION

Period(s) of Significance: c. 1831

Significant Dates: c. 1831

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Coventry Historical Society

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>283890</u>	B	<u>4620130</u>	
C	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	D	<u>          </u>	

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description:  See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification:  See continuation sheet.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: Karl Bodensiek

Organization: for Coventry Historical Society Date: 10/2001

Street & Number: 57 Foster Center Road Telephone: 401-397-2672

City or Town: Foster State: RI ZIP: 02825

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Description

The Read School (c. 1831) is a wood-frame one-room schoolhouse. It is located on Flat River Road (State Route 117) at its intersection with Read Schoolhouse Road. The building is a plain rectangular block, 18x24 feet, with a gable roof. Both the school and its setting are well preserved.

The school is clapboarded and trimmed with flat window and door casings and wide water-table boards. The roof has projecting eaves and raked cornices. A single-flue brick chimney is located at the north end. The foundation is stone, with a four-foot cellar at the north reached through a metal bulkhead installed in the early 1980s.

The south end has two 6-panel doors under a flat-roof entryway with a 10-light transom. Over the door is a round window, also repeated on the north gable. On each of the side walls are three paired windows, with double-hung 6/6 wood sash, flat casings, projecting lintels with molded caps, and louvered wooden blinds. The sash are 1970s replacements.

On the interior is a single classroom, about 21 feet long, partitioned at the entrance into a small vestibule divided into separate girls' and boys' entrances. The room has a barrel-vaulted plaster ceiling. At the north end is a teacher's dais, about six inches high and four feet deep. Wood-framed blackboards with a chalk-ledge are on all four walls.

The windows are spaced evenly within the classroom on the east and west walls. The doors and windows have flat casings and projecting lintels with molded caps. The floors are 6-inch maple planks. The attic is reached by two hatchways, one in the vestibule and one in the classroom above the woodstove. Here, the building's roof structure is visible: hewn common rafters and collar ties, without a ridge pole, and the arched form-work to which the ceiling lath is fastened.

A wood-burning stove, not original, is located at the southern end of the classroom. A similar stove provided the only source of heat for the building until an electric baseboard system was installed in 1991. Electricity was introduced in 1933, and the three hanging light fixtures date from that period. The school had no source of running water until an artesian well with a hand-pump was dug in 1938. Two privies located to the northwest of the schoolhouse were in use up to the time of the school's closing. The two privies currently on the property are replacements: the east privy was donated and moved from the Mount Vernon Baptist

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Meetinghouse, while the west privy is a recent reproduction. An indoor toilet was installed in 1991 in the vestibule area.

The schoolhouse is located on a corner lot, on a rise above Flat River Road. Several road improvements created an embankment that did not exist originally. The street-facing sides of the property are edged with a flat baluster wooden fence, recreated in 1990 using historic photographic evidence. The north and west lines of the schoolyard are marked by fieldstone walls and a tree line. There is an asphalt drive entered from Read Schoolhouse Road; a concrete walkway leads to the entrance; both date from the 1980s.

### Photographs

Photographer: Karl Bodensiek

Date: November, 2001

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission  
(The above information applies to all photographs)

Photo #1

View: South end.

Photo #2

View: North (rear) and west sides.

Photo #3

View: Interior, facing south; vestibule doors on either side of teacher's desk.

Photo #4

View: Interior, facing north; dais at north end.

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Significance

Summary

The Read Schoolhouse (c. 1831) is significant for its ability to document more than a century of public elementary education in Coventry. It is the least altered of the seven nineteenth-century schoolhouses which survive in the town and is typical of the group in scale and design.

The school is set amidst a cluster of farms that date mostly from the 1820s. Read School is located on the old main road from Warwick, and is roughly halfway between the early nineteenth-century mill villages of Washington to the east, and Coventry Centre to the west, each about two miles distant. Within a one-mile radius are five farmhouses and the remains of an early acid works. In 1830, a proprietorship was formed among the farmers of this area for the purpose of building and maintaining Read School. The lot for the schoolhouse was taken from the 40-acre farm of Williams Read; other members of the Read family lived a mile to the west. The proprietors were all adjacent landowners: Williams, Anthony, Benjamin 3<sup>rd</sup>, Thomas and Henry Read, Welcome and Jonathan Pettis, Cory Matteson, Ira Bailey, Josiah Briggs, and James Abbott. Absent from the list is Thomas Arnold, owner and operator of the acid works.

The construction date of Read Schoolhouse has traditionally been established as 1831; the evidence for this date is circumstantial. Physical evidence for this early date is limited to the visible hewn structural members--the floor framing of squared sills with flattened log joists, and the common rafter roof system. The walls are studded, with no structural posts apparent on the interior, marking this as a transitional frame for which a building date in the 1830s is justified. Indications in the proprietors' indenture of 1830 are circumspect: that when the proprietors "shall cease to repair and keep in repair the school-house aforesaid, then this lease will expire and the [grantor] will take peaceable possession thereof after ninety days notice." From this, it has been assumed that the schoolhouse was built relatively soon thereafter. In the second year of the Coventry School Committee teacher examinations, Merret Arnold "having taught one term at Read School--proposes to teach in same district." Mr. Arnold's name is absent from the previous (first) year of the exams, implying that he taught at Read before 1845.

Read Schoolhouse was the first of several schools built in Coventry in

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the decades following Rhode Island's landmark 1828 school law, which established a school fund supplemented by local taxes. On June 2, 1828, a Coventry School Committee was formed by a vote of the Town Meeting. During the succeeding year, the committee "proceeded to divide said town into seven districts...caused teachers to be procured...schools [to be] kept in said districts agreeable to said act" and voted that a \$300 tax "be appropriated to the support of the free and publick schools of this town."

Three additional schools were constructed in Coventry in the 1840s, but there was no consistent system to regulate qualifications of teachers, the use of textbooks or the quality of schoolhouses. Henry Barnard, appointed State Commissioner of Education in 1842, conducted a study of the conditions of public school in 1843 that resulted in the more comprehensive Education Act of 1845. In Coventry, resolutions were presented at the Town Meeting of April 1, 1846, that, "after a contested vote," were adopted "by a very large majority." These resolutions included: a new town tax which would equal one-third of the amount received from the state; the appointment of a six member school committee; and the redefinition of the school district boundaries, now eighteen in number. Read School was district number 13.

The new committee proceeded to meet frequently, and by July had platted district boundaries and formed sub-committees for the examination of teachers and for examining and recommending school books.

Appropriation tables were prepared by the committee yearly that determined allotments based on the average attendance at each district. Records of the teacher examinations exist in the first committee book, dating from 1846 to 1873, and furnish the name, age, residence and educational background of each applicant, as well the district in which he proposed to teach. In the second book of records, from 1874 to 1903, the teachers' names are provided as part of the appropriation tables, along with the salaries disbursed.

Textbooks selected by the School Committee closely followed the list recommended by Barnard in his *School-Houses* (1844). Construction of the Read Schoolhouse, though it pre-dated Barnard's work, had avoided repeating the "common errors in school architecture" described by Barnard. The separate boys' and girls' entrances leading into the vestibule prevented "confusion, rudeness and impropriety," and the location of the teacher's platform at the opposite end of the schoolhouse enabled the instructor to "survey the room at a glance." Placement of windows only on the east and

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west walls provided an abundance of light, without glare, and followed Barnard's stipulation of no windows directly behind the teacher. The high ceiling afforded good air circulation, enhanced ventilation, and helped to diffuse natural light.

Attendance at the Read School from 1846 to 1873 averaged from 9 scholars in 1860 to 21 in 1847, with a median of about 15. This figure was lower in the years 1874 to 1903, with a low of 5 in 1886 and a maximum of 17 in 1877, a 9.7 median. In the town as a whole, the student population ranged from 434 pupils in 1846, increasing to 485 by 1871, peaking at 530 in 1863. Expenditures per student began at \$.94, rising to \$7.20 by 1886, and went towards paying teacher's salaries and purchasing books and firewood.

Eighteen teachers are named at Read for the first twenty years. Four of these taught for more than one year at the school, while it appears that some others were present for one term only. The ages of district 13 teachers ranged from 16 to 27. Just six of them had received training beyond a public school education, all at schools in Rhode Island: the Smithville Seminary in Johnston, the Providence Conference Seminary in East Greenwich, and the Normal School in Bristol. During the thirty years following 1874, twenty-eight teachers are named, following a similar pattern of single term tenures. Nettie Watson was at Read School the longest--she taught for ten years, between 1875 and 1888.

Most of the first-named teachers were from the town of Coventry, while only three that taught at Read were from outside the town: two from Scituate and Johnston, the third from Plainfield, Connecticut. Local teachers at Read School are evident throughout the records, many of them from the families of the proprietors and neighborhood. These include Merret and Lucinda Arnold; George and Horace Read; Eliza, Emaline and Albert Matteson; and Nettie Watson.

In 1867 the school committee voted to divide the districts into three administrative sections, each supervised by one committee member, who was also responsible for administering the teachers' examinations and granting them certification. As the committee refined its administration, it consolidated the holdings of the districts, ensuring that each was in legal possession of its schoolhouse. Prior to the start of the school year in 1870, Bradford and Thomas Read, heirs of Williams Read, quitclaimed the Read School to Thomas Watson, District Treasurer, for one dollar "in consideration of our desire to aid and assist in diffusing the benefits of a good common school education among the inhabitants of School District No.

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13."

In January 1869, a \$300 tax had been approved for repairs to the school, and in September an additional \$275 tax had been levied "to finish repairing, painting and seating the schoolhouse in District 13." This date is consistent with the type of window casing and matched-board wainscoting existing in the schoolhouse. This expenditure accounted for substantial work; by contrast a mere forty dollars was spent to paint and repair the Maple Valley Schoolhouse in District 7, similar in size to Read.

Several changes were taking place in the schools at the turn of the twentieth century. By 1902, it was necessary to appoint a truant officer, and beginning in 1909, students began attending high schools in nearby towns, at Coventry's expense. Several of the small rural schools were closed for a time and then reopened, including those at Maple Valley and Andrews. The school district system was abolished in 1903, although the school committee still oversaw policies and expenditures. Coventry schools were thereafter administered by a superintendent, a teacher appointed to the task, who made regular inspections of each schoolhouse. School district properties were turned over to the town in 1904 by the Rhode Island Supreme Court. District 13 was valued at \$640. In comparison, the appraised values of district no. 1 (Nicholas) was \$119, while district 17 (Quidnick) was \$7289. To meet the needs of a growing population in the eastern part of town, Bakerville School, a "modern school with sixteen rooms," was constructed in the village of Anthony in 1922.

Read School had seen a continuing decline in attendance--down to eight in 1903, which was lower than at any other time since the mid-1880s and in June, 1905, it was closed. It was re-opened, possibly as early as 1909, certainly by 1912, when a complaint was made "against one Marchaud Siembab for disturbing Read School and assaulting the teacher."

During the 1930s and 1940s, the smaller schoolhouses in Coventry were closed for the final time, as upkeep and repairs were increasingly burdensome to the town, and educational standards became more regimented. In 1946, the schools at Bowens Hill, Maple Valley and Colvintown were abandoned. New schools were planned and built in the post-World War II years. The Western Coventry Elementary School, five miles to the west of the Read School, was built in 1948, with twelve classrooms--one for each grade. With the opening of the nearby Washington-Tiogogue School in 1951, Read Schoolhouse was at last made obsolete. Last open for classes in the spring of that year, the schoolhouse was used for storage by the School

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Department until 1973. Since that time it has been leased from the town by the Coventry Historical Society, who have restored the building and currently conduct tours and hold meetings there.

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Major Bibliographical References

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- Barnard, Henry. School-Houses. Providence, 1844.
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- Barnard, Henry. Reports and documents relating to the Public Schools of Rhode Island for 1848. Providence, 1849.
- Beers, D. G. & Co. Atlas of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Philadelphia, 1870.
- Cole, J. R. History of Washington and Kent Counties, Rhode Island, New York; W. W. Preston & Co., 1889.
- Coventry, Town of. Registrar of Deeds, Record of Deeds, ms.; dates various
- Coventry, Town of. Records of the School Committee of the Town of Coventry 1846-1874, ms.
- Coventry, Town of. Records of the School Committee of the Town of Coventry 1874-1909, ms.
- Coventry, Town of. Records of the School Committee of the Town of Coventry 1909-1925, ms.
- Coventry, Town of. Minutes of the School Committee 1926-1942, ms.
- Coventry, Town of. Minutes of the Regular Meetings of the Coventry School Committee 1943-1957, ms.
- Coventry, Town of. Town Meeting Records, ms.; dates various
- Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. Historic and Architectural Resources of Coventry, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report. Providence, 1978.
- Walling, Henry F. Map of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Providence, RI, C. C. Brown Publishing, 1851.

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Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description:

Town of Coventry Assessor's Plat 58 Lot 1. South bound: Flat River Road, 102 feet; east bound: 106.5 feet on Read School House Road; containing 10,890 square feet.

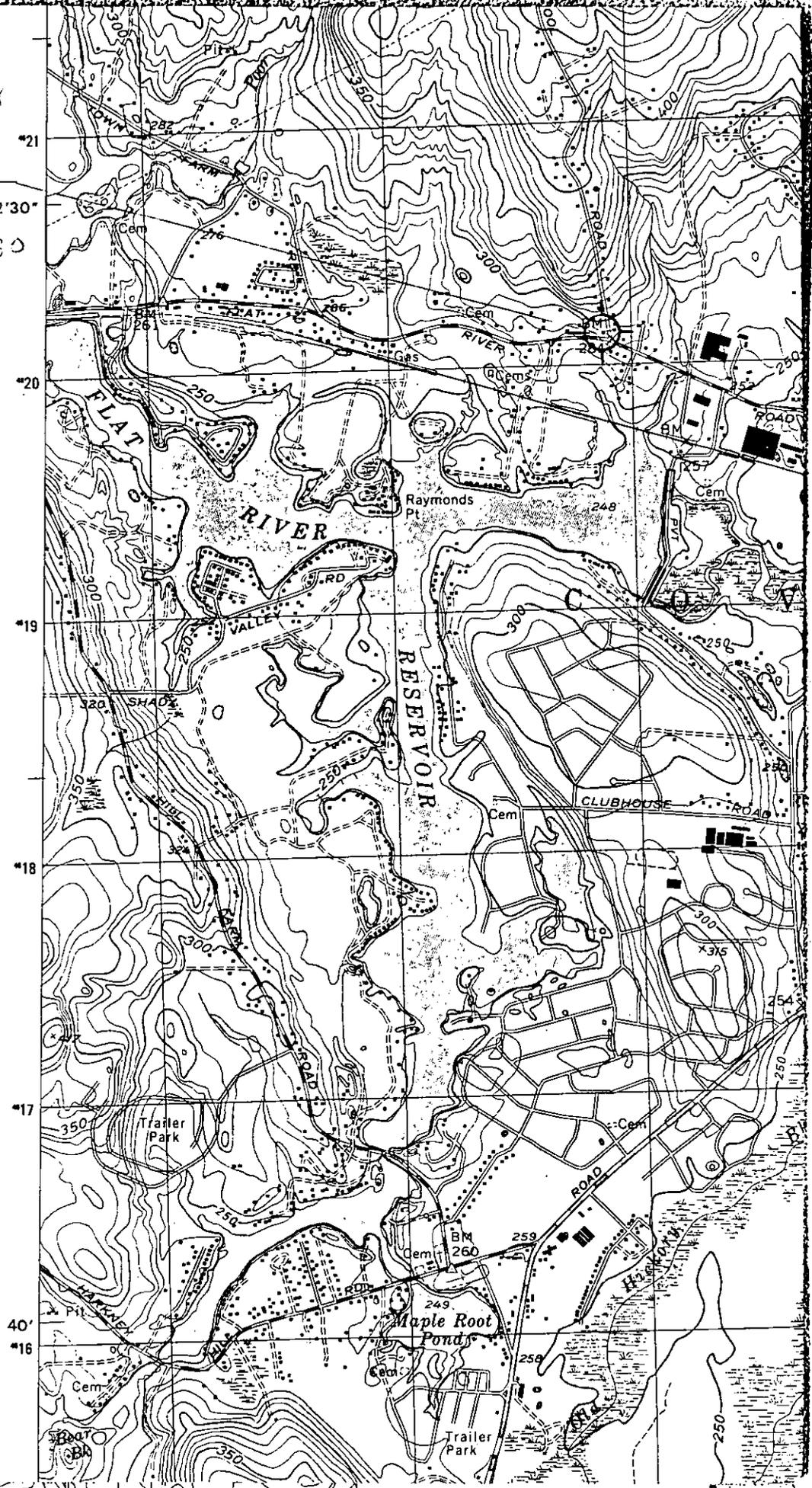
Boundary Justification:

Lot corresponds with 1870 deed (B 28 P 153) from Bradford C. and Thomas H. Read to Thomas Watson, Treasurer of School District number 13, "containing about one fourth of an acre" with allowances for twentieth century improvements to Flat River Road. South bound: "The Warwick Road" (Flat River Road); east bound, 102 feet: "Road leading over Pettis Hill" (Read School House Road.)

READ SCHOOLHOUSE  
COVENTRY KENT COUNTY  
RHODE ISLAND

UTM REFERENCE 42°30'

19/233590/4620130



MEMO

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION

PAMELA A. KENNEDY

DEPUTY DIRECTOR

*Pam*

TO

*file*

*Photo removed  
5/13/02*

*Lead Schoolhouse*



Read School  
Kent County, Coventry, R.I.  
photo #1 of 4



Reed School  
Kent County, Coventry, RI  
Photo #2 of 4



Read School  
Kent County, Coventry, RI  
Photo # 3 of 4



Read School  
Kent County, Coventry, RI  
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