

## **Historical Walking Tour of North Front Street**

All of the original buildings on Front Street were of log. Later buildings, even large ones were frame. Consequently they burned with awesome regularity. A devastating fire on June 30, 1876 destroyed over 20 buildings, some businesses and some homes causing a loss of upwards of \$75,000 as reported in Linn's History of Centre and Clinton Counties, 1883. Therefore, almost every structure on Front Street dates from later than the fire. At that time, coal, lumber and clay had brought prosperity to town and many new and larger buildings were constructed.

The most interesting and historic views of downtown Philipsburg will give you a crick in the neck. The beautiful cornices on the tops of the buildings, especially those in the block between Presqueisle and Laurel, and the moldings around second and third floor windows on many of the buildings are original. They were often designed by the builders. The many brick buildings are evidence of the refractories in the area with a lot of interesting brick decoration to the upper fronts. Many first floors unfortunately have been remodeled out of all historic value.

From the library, walk up to Front Street and turn left. The tour starts at Spruce Street, one block down.

On the left (East) side is the large Adleman and Ratowsky Building. This was built about 1903 with several extensions to the back (Spruce Street) as business grew. It was a department store with clothing, furniture and other goods. The front is basically unchanged and is the only cast iron front left on the street.

Next to the A & R, Grattan's Drug Store offers a remodeled facade, but also the best chocolate ice cream sodas and milk shakes around at its soda fountain counter.

The Main Won Chinese restaurant and a veterinarian are in the Ryman Building. It is a two-story brick building with a facade which dates from the teens.

Good Will is housed in a low buff brick building. Next to it is a parking lot which was originally a G.C. Murphy store, then a clothing store. This was also a victim of fire.

Next to the parking lot, a three story building housed the Scheffer Hotel which burned in 1885. In 1919 Louis Finberg erected the present building for a dry goods store. When the metal McCrory front was removed, Louis Finberg's name was revealed in the brick facade. For more than 60 years the building housed the McCrory 5 and 10. Extensive renovation is being carried out by a local business man to provide retail space on the first floor and offices on the second floor. Windows on the sides which were bricked up for years are being opened up.

On the west side of Front Street at Spruce is the Stott Building, built in 1919. It was originally an automotive service garage. A freight elevator in the back took cars up to a storage area where private citizens could rent space to have their motorcars put up on blocks for the winter. The second floor front was office space, and the caretaker had an apartment on the third floor front. A serious fire a few months ago has necessitated improvements to the facade and interior. That freight elevator shaft carried the fire quickly from the first floor rear clear to the top.

Also of the west side, the large building was built by the Odd Fellows Lodge about 1920. You can see I.O.O.F. in the brick work at the cornice level. The building then housed the Majestic Theatre ( the marquee was recently removed), a wholesale business and is now storage for Navasky's clothing.

Next is the Moshannon Bank Building, built in 1917, which rose from the ashes of the Barnes Block after a fire in 1916. The Pine Street corner was designed to house the Moshannon National Bank which was organized in 1881 and formerly housed elsewhere on Front Street. The rest of the first floor was retail space. The offices of the Philipsburg Revitalization

Corporation are in the middle of this space. The façade of the bank suffered a face lift in the early 1970's.

On the southeast corner of Front and Pine Streets is the Masonic Building. It was built in 1931 by Fred Ibberson. His drug store and Molly Maguire's men's clothing store shared the first floor, with the Masonic Lodge upstairs. The Masons recently completed a façade improvement which fortunately retained the original style of the cornices. The upper corner blocks, round medallions set in the brick and pillars between the windows are of interest. The front windows have been reduced in size, but those on the Pine Street side are original. In the 1940s when Ibberson's Drug store occupied the corner, the facade was decorated with black tile. Mussers, who own Gardner's Candy Store there now, did some of restoration of the front.

Philips Park next door once was the site of Colose's produce shop. It sported a peanut roaster that was wheeled out front on Saturday night and perfumed the air. The park is maintained by the borough with the help of several local women.

The Little Restaurant has suffered many face lifts over the years, but the roof line shows it to be one of the earliest buildings left in town.

The Coal Exchange Hotel occupied the site where Representative Lynn Herman's office and Save More Outlet are now. A picture in the Historical Foundation shows the front of the hotel.

Rothrock's clothing store, which was Western Auto for many years until the late '1940s, was the residence and business house of Strause, Lehman and Company, built in the 1880's. It was a beautiful edifice, with a canopy over the sidewalk held up by slender wrought iron pillars. A wrought iron railing guarded the second floor windows, and in the middle of the third floor, a six window bay jutted out. The bay was also topped with fanciful wrought iron. Some of the facade details can still be seen. An engraving of the facade may be seen in Linn's History of Centre and Clinton Counties, 1883.

Olenick's Printing occupies what was once called the Wright Building. It sported lovely tin cornices and trim. Only the cornice is left.

The narrow empty lot next was Hoffman's Tobacco Shop. It is listed in the 1910 Business Directory. A cigar store Indian sported his wares in front on good days. A building where the newer buff brick stands used to be Mildred Ibberson's ladies store.

The next two buildings were erected in the early 1900's. They have different elevations but similar brick work. One is a single front, the other double. The window treatments have been removed. At one time Sam Irwin's drug store was housed in this building. When it went, another soda counter was removed from the street scene!

The two story double building at the corner probably dates from the same era as its neighbor.

Back to Pine Street and going up the west side, we begin with the Schoonover Building. It has wonderful little turrets around the roof line. Built in 1911, it seems to have always housed a jewelry store. The brick work extending back Pine Street is interesting as it shows a series of repairs (after fires, of course) and enlargements.

After a three story buff brick building that in the thirties housed the era's teen hang-out, the Sugar Bowl, and the bowling alley. The present All Family Vision, a part of the theatre building, was Mrs. Landy's dress shop.

The Rowland Theatre is on the National Register. It was built in 1917 by Charles Rowland who also refurbished the Rowland House on South Centre Street. The theatre occupies the space of Pierce's Opera House which burned on New Year's Eve, 1910. Perhaps because of the history of the site, Charles Rowland liked to explain that his theatre was completely fire proof . The theatre has a lovely lobby with stained glass skylight and painted murals. Below the stage are dressing rooms and a "green room". At the back of the building there were huge doors that backed onto a

railroad siding. When the circus came to town, the animals and big equipment moved directly from the rail cars to the back of the stage. Recent renovations have vastly improved the appearance of the interior. With its big screen and Dolby sound, the theatre attracts movies fans from all over central Pennsylvania.

Transfer Express, a wood craft and Tee shirt shop is in the same building as the theatre.

The next two buildings have different rooflines but the same brick work, so were probably built around the same time. Pennsylvania Electric was in one of these in the 1950s.

The hair dresser/antique shop not only has a clever name (Hairloom) but it has retained its original tin ceiling and skylight.

We have no information about the next couple of buildings except that the Philipsburg office of the Progress has a fairly recent front.

The building housing Ricotta's Jewelry Store is probably the oldest on the street and one of few dating earlier than 1880. It is frame encased in brick with a roof that slopes to the back.

The modern dentist office at the corner (which ignores the building lines of the rest of the block) occupies the site of what was Jones's Hardware store, which shows on the 1874 Atlas.

On the southeast corner of Front and Laurel Streets is a three story painted brick building with interesting window trim and cornices. It was built in 1876 at a cost of \$8000.00 and was called the Taylor Building.

The Dollar Store next door is a double two story brick with cornices and window trim. Also built in 1876 by a Mr. McCausland, it was the site for

many years of Burchfields department store. The Burchfields had a lovely home on the Corner of Presqueisle and Sixth Streets.

The triple building next up the street housing Carolle's Kitchen, the Literacy Center and Frankie's Sub Station has wonderful heavy cornices and window trim, although the windows have been reduced. Linn's History says that this was the Gray Block, built for \$15,000.00.

The triple brick building on the corner was the Foster Block, costing at the time \$1500. For many years this was the home of Hoover's Hardware. It now houses the Outdoorsman's Corner. This building has the best cornices and window trim, continuing around the corner of Presqueisle Street. It has been cared for and painted.

The building on the southwest corner of Front and Laurel was probably built in the boom days of the 1880s. This housed Wolf Furniture for years and then Heilig Meyers. It is empty at present.

A lovely frame Victorian home built by Dr. John McGirk after his "mansion", also on Front Street, burned in the fire of 1876, was torn down to erect the M & T Bank, successor to a number of banking manifestations, and also unmindful of the streetscape in this block.

The tall, three story red brick building next to the bank has an interesting front although the windows are reduced. It features a series of arches that are reduced in size as they go up. Brown's Drug Store and Hoffer's Novelty Store were here for many years. Hoffer's had a soda fountain with wire tables and chairs. In the forties, if one of us broke a dish at home, we were sent to Hoffer's to get another piece of Fiesta Ware. At present it is occupied by the T & D Dollarama and Gary's Hair Salon.

Conklin's Corner Antique Mall is in a large grey stone building that was originally the First National Bank. There were offices on the second and third floors. Each floor front is slightly different, the first two offering arches. There is a deep roof overhang not original to the 1871 building, but part of

a 1916 remodeling. Fortunately, the Conklins care about the building and the town and have done a tasteful renovation. They are planning more improvements on the Presqueisle Street side. The Antique Mall is on the first two floors with the Corridor O offices on the third.

Across Presqueisle Street is South Front Street, but as it is part of the commercial district, we will include it here.

On the southwest corner is a large yellow brick building known in times past as the Potter House (hotel). In 1910 it housed the Crissman and Brown Pharmacy on the corner. Wilbur Brown moved down to the middle of the next block sometime in the 1920's. Also in 1910 White's Lentils and Corn shop was at that address.

The vacant lot next was occupied by Brink's Hotel. It was later than 1910. The hotel catered to salesmen. In increasingly decrepit condition, it was razed in the 1990s.

The large blue painted brick building on the Beaver Street corner was built as a home in the middle 1800s by Albert Owen in Federal style. Dr. and Mrs. Diener added the porch on the Beaver Street side, to which the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Tim Foreman added the windows. Most of the glass in the building is original. There seems to have always been a commercial use on the street at the north end. A bank was there at some time, as there is a walk-in vault. A picture exists of George Parker with his wagon float for the 1909 Homecoming parade in front of the building. He had a seed and flower shop there for many years. A gift shop took its place, then a hat vender. When Owen Curtis bought the building he had a used clothing store there. Presently it is Sharon and Kelly's Beauty Shop.

On the southeast corner of Front and Presqueisle is a used car lot. This is the site of the Barnes Block, which burned in 1916. There were retail shops on the first floor, including Jones Doors and Sashes. The telephone company was housed upstairs. On the day of the fire a telephone company employee rescued the operators, then manned the switchboard until the fire department forced him to leave just before the floor collapsed. He

received a commendation for bravery. Wade Fink had a Sunoco Station on the site for many years.

The next two brick (now covered with siding) buildings were built as homes. The larger one housed the Hoffer family who ran the store in the next block down. It is now the food bank. The smaller one was the office and home of Dr. Lorenzo Runk. It is now apartments.

On the corner, the large brick house was built in 1912 by Dr. John Dale, who came to Philipsburg from Falls Creek to practice at the McGirk Sanitarium. His office was in the north side and the family lived in the rest. Dr. Robert Dewey, married to Dr. Dale's daughter, had his optometry offices there from 1936 to 1960. At that time Hugh Green moved his funeral parlor there. The family lived upstairs. It is now the office of Charles A. Jones Insurance.

This tour was compiled by Sandra Dewey Martin and Walter Swoope for the National Historic Preservation Week celebration. We hope you enjoy it and that you will come back to see more of Philipsburg.