

Historical Walking Tour of Residential Philipsburg

Welcome to Historic Philipsburg. This walking tour radiates from Borough Hall in three directions; four blocks up South Centre Street to Oak Street, four blocks out Presqueisle Street to Seventh Street, and two and one half blocks to the Simler log house at Second and Laurel Streets. Depending on your time and interest, you may do all or some of the tour at one time. There are homes on South Centre Street, homes and churches on Presqueisle Street, one historic home, one historic church and the Simler House on Laurel Street.

The land where Philipsburg now stands was purchased by the Philips brothers, Henry, James and Hardman. Henry and James came to Milesburg, established a store, had Baron Trezulney survey the land, then advertised for settlers. Their advertisement offered a road from Milesburg, a navigable river and four acre lots. Later they added an additional four acre lot "out of town". (The four acre additional lot belonging to George Schulz became the Union Church and Cemetery between 6th and 7th Streets.)

The first homes and businesses were placed around Front and Second Streets, from Beaver to Pine. An 1813 map shows development on both sides of Front Street, stretching down almost to Point Lookout, as well as structures near the center that reached Third Street.

As Philipsburg developed, building proceeded down Front Street, out Presqueisle Street and in both directions on Second, Centre and Fourth Streets. By 1873 there were homes and businesses over most of the incorporated borough as we see it today. An atlas published by A. Pomeroy & CO., 31 South 6th Street, Philadelphia, in 1874, shows the footprints of many homes standing today.

North and South Parks, at the intersection of Presqueisle and Centre Streets, were a village common at first, used for grazing. In 1887 a borough hall was begun a block below North Park. After a few courses of brick, it was decided to go against the wishes of Hardman Philips who had wanted

the view north and south retained, and the present Borough Hall was built in North Park. Downstairs was the fire hall with the borough offices upstairs. Eventually both the fire hall and the borough offices outgrew their space. The fire hall was relocated twice, finally to its present location at Locust and Front Streets, and the Borough offices went downstairs. For a time the library occupied the second floor. The guns in front of the structure came from the Navy, one of which was probably used in the Mexican-American War. The Grand Army of the Republic (Civil War veterans) donated them to the town. There are two historic markers in front, one of which lists the names of the original settlers, while the other tells of the area when they first arrived. A mile marker from the Philadelphia to Erie Turnpike, which opened through Philipsburg in 1821 gives the distance to Curwensville. The bell also on the lawn in front was the original fire bell, probably first in the tower of the building.

Starting at Borough Hall, it is a short walk to some of the historic and lovely homes in Philipsburg.

South Centre Street (Paved for the first time in 1930.)

With your back to Borough Hall, walk up through South Park. The beautiful plantings are the work of four sisters: Becky Hill, Sandra Slogosky, Nancy Lamb and Georgia Chandler. A statue of a Civil War soldier was originally in the center of the fountain, but young men knocked it over so many times that a stone statue was finally put up where it couldn't be reached! Take time to read the plaques on the sides of the plinth for more Philipsburg history. The cannons in the park were cast at West Point, New York, by a then new process that added steel bands to keep them from splitting when fired in rapid succession. They were used by the Army in the Civil War, and secured for the town by the Grand Army of the Republic, veterans of that war.

On the west (right) side of South Centre Street at the corner of Beaver Street (originally a small stream with beaver dams at the bottom) is one of the oldest houses in town. It is a white frame building built before 1820. The original structure was added to slightly over the years, but it still shows about the same footprint as is seen in the 1874 Atlas. The home is owned

today by Thomas Boyd, a Borough Councilman.

Across Beaver Street is the Baptist Church. It shows as a much smaller building in the Atlas. Next to the church, at 113 is the home of Mrs. William Bennett. A timber frame building, this may be the third oldest residence left in town. It was built by 1840 and has changed little in dimensions since 1874. The next two homes, 117 and 121, and the more neglected home at the corner of Maple Street, were built after 1874 as the Atlas shows an empty lot there. 117, a white frame house, is a typical Victorian town home with Italianate features, probably built in the 1890's. There is an interestingly carved Dutch door to the left of the main entrance. Mrs. Hilda Hoover has lived here since the early 1950's. Next to it, at 121, is a smaller frame house with "eyebrow" windows on the third floor. The second floor overhang over the driveway was probably built to house the bathtub when plumbing reached the second floor. A very nice stained glass window is at the head of the tub for some obscure reason. Another architectural feature of this house is the "cure porch" over the front porch. This is where the Victorians put their tubercular uncle so he could get lots of fresh air. Another great stained glass window is in the cure porch. The house was perhaps built by a Lingle family. Switzers lived here from before 1900. The Switzer women had a hat shop on Front Street, over what is now C & M Sports and Thomas Switzer had a business further down Front Street. In 1912 the home was bought by the Barnes family. It was purchased from them in 1992 by the Martins. Mrs. Martin is past Mayor of Philipsburg. The twig swing and glider on the porch were made by Jesse Martin's uncle, Fred Myer, who had a farm above Osceola. There is a picture of the Myer family on the swing taken about 1918, so it is at least that old.

Cross Maple Street. At 213 is a buff brick foursquare built in 1906. A Journal note of that year states that Cashier (later bank president) John Fryberger had moved his young family into a new brick house. The sun porches on the tennis court side were added in the mid 1920's. The house has been continually occupied by descendants of Mr. Fryberger. Walter Swoope is the present resident.

Cross Hickory Street and walk on up to the corner of Oak Street. Across South Centre Street is the finest example of Victorian Queen Ann architecture in town. This large green frame building has all the turrets and

gingerbread one could desire. Cross South Centre Street here after you have viewed the house from a distance to appreciate the architectural details. The Loraine House, built originally in 1889, is owned by Walter Swoope. It was in deplorable condition when he purchased it in 1975. He spent years restoring it to its former glory, for which the town is extremely grateful. A feature of the inside is the round shower in the main bathroom, with vertical tubes and horizontal bands that spray water all over, in addition to the huge showerhead above. The windows are duplicates of the original ones, and the brickwork was designed from photos of the home taken in the early 1900's. Mr. Swoope has photos and documents dating back to 1890.

Walking back toward the park, the next structure is an intrusive modern home, built in the 1950's on the site of the Plumbe Home. This was a lovely stucco Federal building built by Dr. Plumbe who was the personal physician to the Hardman Philips family. In addition to being a physician he was the builder of the Plumbe Forge at Six Mile Run. A historic marker on Route 504 directs visitors to that site.

Crossing Oak Street, the next home of interest is 212 South Centre Street. This frame building belonged to the Thomas J. Lee family. The 1874 Atlas shows an office belonging to John Mull at that site. Mr. Lee was the founder of Lee Industries, which is still a thriving company in town. The present structure dates from around 1900 and is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Slogosky.

208 is owned today by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Humphrey. They have done a fine job of painting the home, a foursquare with Italianate accents built in the 1870's, in typical Victorian fashion. The house was owned for many years by the Holt family and left to the borough to house the library. However, the Library Board chose to sell it and move the library out of town to the Moshannon Valley Economic Development Partnership incubator in North Philipsburg. The library has recently been relocated to Pine Street off Front Street.

Mr. and Mrs. Barry Kovach own the home at 202 South Centre Street. There was a home on this site as early as 1874. For many years the house

was owned by the Houts family, followed by Morningstars who remodeled it extensively in the mid 1920's. Mr. Kovach is redoing the exterior as we speak. There is an interesting round window in the front gable.

Across Maple Street, at 126 South Centre Street is the imposing Rowland House. Built by I. V. Gray in 1883, it was later purchased and enlarged by Charles Rowland. It was he who removed the former stick style porch and added the present rounded one. To see how it once looked, go around back and look at that porch. It is still the original. There are wonderful Arts and Crafts stained glass transoms above most of the downstairs windows. Like the Loraine house, there are turrets and gables aplenty. Enjoy the architecturally interesting details and ignore the brick intrusion at the back added in the late 1950's. Mr. Rowland is also responsible for the Rowland Theatre on Front Street.

Next to the Rowland House is a home built by the Hollenbach family at about the same time. Most of the interesting exterior details have been lost or removed.

The buff brick house at 112 is owned by Dr. and Mrs. Robert Steward. It was built in 1912 by the Nuttall family. Mr. Nuttall was a botanist who has several species of plants named for him. The next owner was William France, active in the Refractories industry. This is a different style from the mainly Victorian homes on the street with its tile roofs. In addition to the brick outside, there is a brick fireplace in the living room with a wonderful tile picture on the surround. On the South Park side, a large stained glass window can be seen. Also notice the front entrance glass.

At 100 South Centre Street is the home of John Knowles. On one of the bay windows in the dining room is scratched A.W. Ltngle, 1876. The story is that the house was built for newlyweds, and he used her ring to sign the window. The house was originally frame, but the front was encased in brick in Georgian style in 1934. On the Beaver Street side the original siding shows. George McGaffey bought the home in 1890 and descendants were there for over 100 years.

The two small houses across Beaver Street are also among the oldest houses in town, but there hasn't been information found about them to date

If you are going on to the East Presque Isle Street tour, cross at the Park (carefully) and turn right on East Presque Isle. If you are going directly to the Simler House, cross to the sidewalk around Borough Hall and follow the directions for North Centre and Laurel Streets.

East Presque Isle Street

From Borough Hall turn left (if you are coming from the South Centre Street tour, turn right on East Presque Isle) and walk up to the Union Church between Sixth and Seventh Streets. This description starts there and comes back toward Borough Hall.

As mentioned previously, the Union Church and Cemetery are located on what was George Shultz's "out" lot. Mr. Schultz and his wife are the only original settlers who remained in Philipsburg the rest of their lives. Their grave is to the back (Laurel Street) part of the cemetery, near the 300 plus year old oak tree. At least one Revolutionary War soldier is buried here. Of course, rumor hath that he was a Prussian?! There are a number of Civil War veterans in the cemetery. On the Seventh Street side is a raised plot with a wrought iron fence around it. Here are buried the children of Hardman and Sophie Philips. None of their children survived to adulthood. Hardman left Philipsburg and returned to England where he is buried. Sophie stayed several years longer before she went back to her home in Philadelphia where she is buried.

In 1820 a subscription was taken up for a building on the lot, which would be used for a school, a meeting place and for itinerant preachers. A log building was raised on the site, which served the community for all three purposes. A further subscription around 1842 was raised to add the bell tower in front and an extension in the back as well as adding a coat of stucco to the exterior. Hence the sobriquet, "Old Mud Church." Since Hardman Philips had paid the lion's share of the cost each time, he announced that the church would henceforth be an Episcopal Church, excluding all others. The towns folk rose up, took him to court, and the judge in Bellefonte decided for the people. The Philips family then donated the lot at the corner of Fourth and Presque Isle Streets for an Episcopal

Church, where St. Paul's stands now. The windows of the Union Church are topped with Quatrefoil designs, carved with a penknife. The interior is essentially original, except for the tin chandelier in the middle, which is a copy. There is a bell in the tower, which came from the screw factory down at Point Lookout. This was the first screw factory in the United States.

When you leave the church, look across Presqueisle Street at the top of the field. This is Halehurst, built by Hardman Philips in 1813, called by him Moshannon Hall. He was not satisfied with the more humble log house built by his older brothers on Front Street. The house is privately owned and not open for tours.

Across Sixth Street, the white brick home from 1900 belonged to the Burchfield family who ran a department store on Front Street. Originally the porch was open. The house features stained glass windows on the first floor.

The buff brick house at number 515 dates prior to 1895 and was originally a two-story frame structure with a chicken coop in the rear. Around 1900 it was brick encased and had a third floor added to the front only. It features lovely stained glass windows and a garden that runs back to Laurel Street. It became a "Tourist Home" in the late 1950's and is now the Centennial Rose Bed and Breakfast.

The Presbyterian Church is on the corner of Fifth Street. It was built in 1922 with the minister's home right next to it. The original Presbyterian Church on Second Street was destroyed on July 4, 1907 when a sky rocket set it on fire.

Across Fifth Street is a frame structure, also built in the late 1800's, with a typical Victorian porch. Next to it is a brick home with a beautifully carved front door, which contains the date 1884. All of the woodwork in the living room, including the fireplace surround and the stairs, is chestnut. This building was converted from a home to a doctor's office in the 1950's and is once more a home. In the middle of the block is a small structure built in the early 1900's that was a home, a church, storage for the Pennhurst Players (a local drama group), and is now a home again.

Across Presqueisle Street at Fourth Street is the Episcopal Church, built in 1911. There is a story, not proven, that the architect had designed a cathedral in his youth and had never gotten a contract to build it. In his old age, he was given the contract for this church, so he reduced his cathedral plan to build it. The fact that the tower has always leaked is blamed on this shrinkage! A previous structure on this site held the first electric lights in a church in the United States. However, they were carbon arc lights and made so much noise the congregation couldn't hear the service so they were removed. When the church is open it is possible to see the wonderful needlepoint cushions in the Chapel and at the main altar, which were done by the ladies of the church.

Crossing Fourth Street, on the right is a brick home, now two businesses, once owned by the Barnes family and built in the late 1890's. Directly across Presqueisle Street from the Barnes house is a lovely home, which was built near the end of the 19th century by the Dunsmore family. It has wonderful stained glass windows and excellent woodwork. Next to the Barnes House is the American Legion in the remains of a Victorian home built by the Brumbagh family.

If you cross to the walk that runs around Borough Hall and turn right, you will see on your right at the corner of North Centre Street and Laurel Street the Arts and Crafts home built by Harold Crosby in 1912, where Representative Lynn Herman and his wife live. Stay on the walk and turn left around the end of North Park. As you cross to the other side of North Centre Street, (carefully, please!) on your right is the Lutheran Church. This is the original building, built in 1866. There is a "graphology" picture of this church in the Centre Furnace Mansion, made up of Bible passages and the signatures of those who contributed at least \$1.00 to the construction. On the left is the Post Office. You will be able to see the Simler House at the end of the block on your right.

The Simler House was built by John Henry Simler, one of the original settlers. His first house was a block away, at the corner of Front and Laurel Streets. This house was made of hewn logs and is two and one half stories. It has just completed an extensive renovation after hiding for 170 odd years under siding. Fortunately, a few people in the area remembered what was

under there, and when it came into the hands of a local family they donated it to the Borough. Most of the funds to carry out the restoration came from a descendent of John Henry Simler. The building was continuously occupied as either a residence or a business from the time it was built until just before renovation began. John Henry had a tavern in the Laurel Street side and made shoes in a lean-to on the back, which has since been demolished. His mother-in-law ran a poorhouse and orphanage there after he returned to Philadelphia. The building was a bakery for many years, and then converted back to homes. Notice the length and width of the logs, as indicators of the size of the trees that were here when the settlers arrived. John Henry is said to have noted that he had to chop seven trees before one fell?! A few logs had to be replaced, but they were taken from a barn in the area of the same approximate date. A good deal of the glass is original. The roof was made of hand split wood shingles. They are unique in that they are lapped both top to bottom and left to right. Some of the original shingles remained. They are on display inside the house. The replacement shingles are hand split in the same manner used in the early 1800's.

We hope that you enjoyed your visit to some of Philipsburg's Historic District and will come back to see us again. The research and writing for this tour were done by Sandra Dewey Martin and Walter M. Swoope.