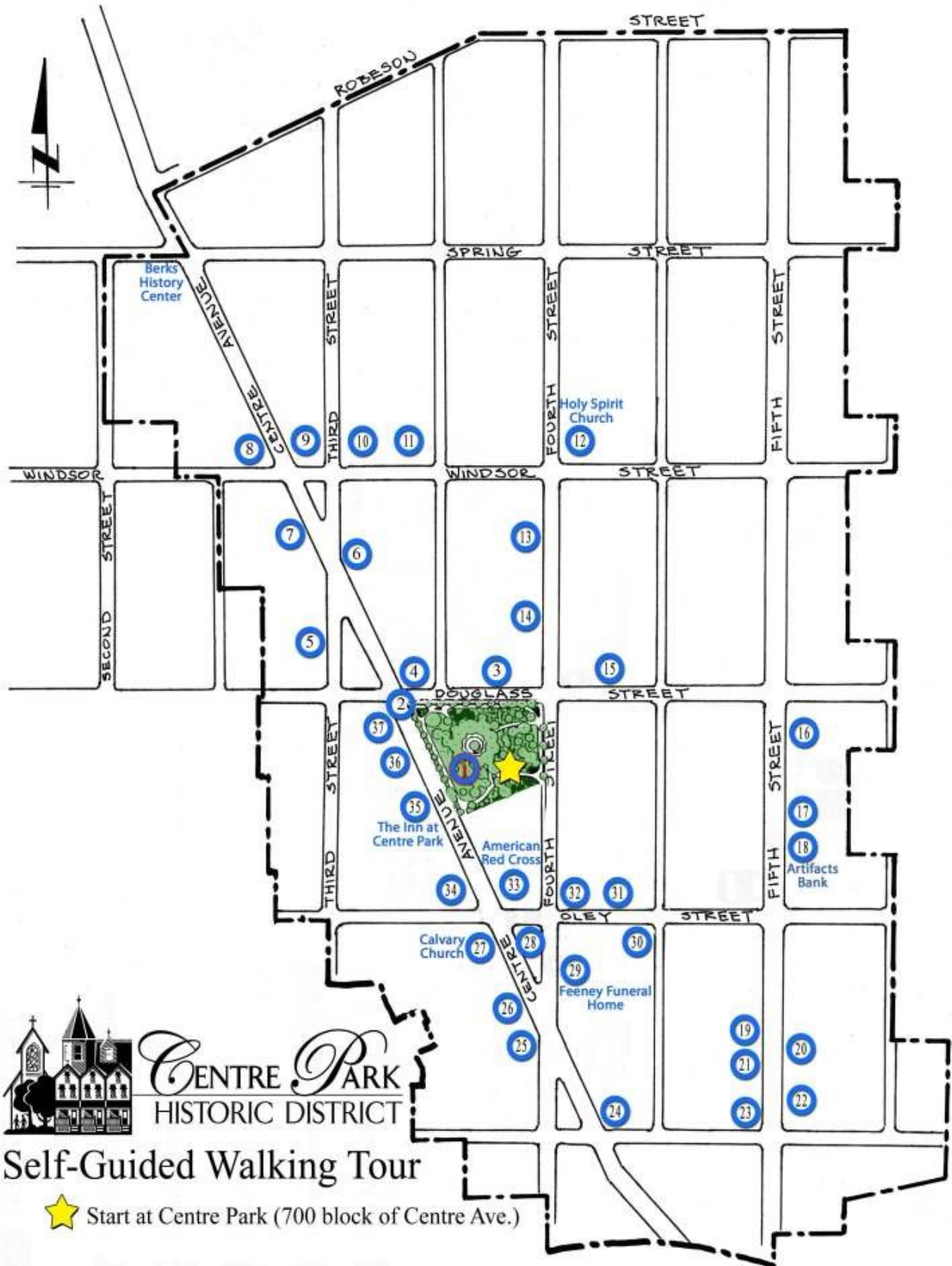


Self-Guided Walking Tour



CENTRE PARK
HISTORIC DISTRICT

Self-Guided Walking Tour

★ Start at Centre Park (700 block of Centre Ave.)

HISTORY



The neighborhood known as the Centre Park Historic District is situated in the northwestern area of the City of Reading. A horse-drawn trolley line established by the Reading City Passenger Railway Company in 1874 was an important catalyst for the development of this area as Reading's first suburb. The greatest amount of residential construction occurred between 1895 and 1915.

The District's large Victorian and early 20th Century mansions are concentrated along Centre Avenue and North Fifth Streets. The architecture along many of the other streets is composed mainly of large semi-detached and row houses set back from the street with lawns or terraces. These homes are graciously ornamented with high levels of craftsmanship in wood and masonry detailing. The half-streets exhibit more modest rowhomes with front porches often built right up to the public sidewalk. Some of the many fine examples of architectural styles in the neighborhood included Queen Anne, Gothic Revival, Georgian Revival, Victorian Romanesque and Reading-German.

Before beginning the tour, please note, for your safety and the privacy of our residents, view all properties from the public sidewalk only. Please do not trespass on private property.

Begin your tour at Centre Park located in the 700 Block of Centre Avenue (Route 61), Reading, PA 19601.

1. Centre Park – The neighborhood's preeminent green, open space is Centre Park, located between the 700 blocks of Centre Avenue and North 4th Streets, on the south side of the 300 block of Douglass Street. The Park is the former site of the ornate mansion built by John Barbey in the 1890's. John Barbey became the president of the Peter Barbey and Sons Brewery after his father's death in 1897. In 1941, the estate was given to the City with the stipulation that an ornamental park be provided. The mansion and carriage house were demolished and a modest green space was created. Centre Park was redesigned in the 1970's with a central fountain featured in a raised circular brick planter. New diagonal paths through the Park reflected preferred circulation patterns. Several years later, period-appropriate light fixtures and park benches were installed. Although the fountain feature is no longer functional, Centre Park continues to be an attractive focal point for the neighborhood, providing a landscaped green space for relaxation and passive recreation for young families as well as for organized activities sponsored by the Centre Park Historic District, Inc.

2. Centre Avenue – The Centre Turnpike toll road was constructed from Reading to Sunbury, PA and completed in 1809. Tolls were discontinued in 1884. It was about this time that horse-drawn trolley service was started and established the Centre Park area as the City's first suburb. Centre Avenue was the "fashionable" address where many of Reading's wealthy industrialists built their mansions as a symbol of their social status and a testament to their wealth.

3. 329,331,333,335 Douglass Street – Constructed in 1902, these four homes are a fine example of a composite row, where separate houses form a complete architectural design, often symmetrical. Constructed by Diller Martin, who built many Queen Anne Style homes in the District, they represent a combination of Queen Anne and Richardsonian Romanesque Styles. The front facades are finished with cut stone. The porches are defined with non-fluted Doric columns, stone pedestals, wooden balustrades and shared pediments with detailed wood carvings. The end-of-row homes each feature a two-story cantilevered corner turret.

4. **805 Centre Avenue** – Designed in the Second Empire Style, this elegant home has long been a neighborhood landmark since it was built in 1910 for Katherine Roerich- Stocker, widow of John G. Stocker who, prior to his death in 1903, operated a brewery at 2200 North 11th Street in partnership with his brother-in-law John Roerich. The house features steeply-pitched mansard roofs, stucco walls, decorative exterior moldings and intricate ironwork. The building was at one time transformed into the “Holiday House”, a fine-dining establishment owned and operated by the Abramowitch family. Around 1980, it was converted back into a single-family home.

5. **804–818 Centre Avenue** – These visually interesting groupings of semi-detached or twin homes were built by developer Edwin Landis about 1897. The third-floor dormers interrupt the mansard roofs with stepped gable designs which are Flemish in style. There are several variations of the stepped profile in this grouping of homes. The architectural character is predominantly a mixture of Late Victorian styles. The massing and details are mostly Queen Anne. Classical Revival details are evident in the porches which are highlighted by shared pediments with detailed wood carving, Doric order columns and detailed balustrades. The exteriors are finished with cut stone, common in the Romanesque Revival Style. Art glass is used generously in the transoms above the front doors, the parlor windows and the second-floor bay windows.

6. **833–839 Centre Avenue** – Builder Samuel Blatt purchased the lots here and began to construct a composite row containing four houses in 1909. Mr. Blatt and his family lived at 833 Centre Avenue until his death in 1947. This row displays the architectural influence of several popular mid-to-late 19th Century styles. The wide-arched windows with their contrasting dressed stone lintels and the use of the Flemish gable reveal Victorian Romanesque origins. The bay windows, broad welcoming porches and end-of-row turrets reflect Queen Anne influence. The Classical Revival Style is evident in the block cut masonry, engaged Ionic columns at the second story bay windows, as well as the pediment porch roofs accented with dentil molding and supported by Corinthian columns.

7. **840 Centre Avenue** – Built around 1888, this late Queen Anne Style house was the residence of Albert A. Gery, one of the co-founders of the Glen-Gery Brick Company, established in 1908. This semi-detached structure features a dominant-facing gable with a combination of incised ornamentation and decorative exposed trusses. The second-floor large pane windows are bounded by smaller panes of colored glass. Alterations to the first-floor façade were necessary to accommodate the changing building use over time yet reflect the façade’s original design with similar placement of window and door openings. Note the brick driveway that at one time led to a sizable brick carriage house at the rear of the property.

8. **900 Centre Avenue** – The Ferdinand Winter mansion was constructed circa 1890 in the Chateausque Style with some Gothic Revival details. Distinctive elements of this structure include steeply-pitched roofs with a variety of gables and dormers, an elegant corner tower, brick corbelling, ornate woodwork and large porches. Winter and his partner, Ferdinand Goetz, manufactured fancy calfskins that were shipped worldwide. Ferdinand Goetz also lived in the 900 block of Centre Ave. but his mansion is no longer standing.

Detour... If time permits, you may wish to explore the Berks History Center at 940 Centre Avenue. The original two-story Georgian Revival Style brick building was designed by Charles H. Muhlenberg, Jr. Completed in 1929, the floors, walls and ceilings of this structure are fireproof poured concrete. The Berks History Center contains a large collection of records and artifacts from Berks County's colonial heritage to the present. Travel another block north and you will find the impressive "Stirling" mansion built for James Hervey Sternbergh in 1892 at 1120 Centre Avenue. Now operating as the Stirling Guest Hotel, the building is a mix of Gothic Revival, Queen Anne and Chateausque Styles. Directly across the street is the Gothic Revival Style entranceway to the Charles Evans Cemetery. Established in 1846 by Reading attorney and philanthropist Charles Evans, the Cemetery was one of the first in the country to embrace the "Rural" Cemetery Movement which provided picturesque, pastoral landscapes and curvilinear paths that served as a place of respite and recreation for residents of the Reading community. Within the Cemetery's sandstone walls you will find a wealth of artistic and architectural expressions among its structures, monuments and grave markers as well as an extensive, luxuriant arboretum.

9. **901 Centre Avenue** – This house was constructed around 1902 for John R. Miller, President of Reading Steam Heat & Power Company, established in 1887 to provide steam heat to many center-city properties. About 1910, it became the home for one of the Corbitt Brothers, co-owners of a downtown Reading automobile dealership. Builder, not architect designed, it is a combination of early 20th Century styles. There is undoubtedly an attempt at the Prairie Style with the hipped roof, rusticated stone sheathing on the first level, the geometric patterns above the second-story windows, the red-tiled roof and the overall massing. The faux half-timbering above the third-story dormer window and the massive, out-scaled three-story colonnaded balcony are elements representative of other styles.

10. **901 North Third Street** – Local architect Frederick H. Muhlenberg, of Muhlenberg Brothers, Architects, designed this gracious, rambling Tudor Revival Style home for the family of attorney John M. Frame. Built in 1926, this house resembles the manor houses of Tudor England. Steeply pitched roofs, small diamond-shaped window panes, narrow windows, cross-gables, and massive chimneys are all hallmarks of this style. Creative landscaping adds to the appeal of this romantic design.

11. **303 Windsor Street** – Built in 1903 as the private residence of Oliver M. and Mary Anne Weand, this home and the matching carriage house are examples of the Classical Revival Style popular in the early 20th Century. Oliver Weand, a building contractor, designed and built the City's first sewage treatment plant on Fritz's Island in 1896. The geometry of the house façade is defined through the central entrance and porch, symmetrical window placement and side porches on the east and west elevations. All of the porches are supported by original fluted columns of the Doric order with wooden balustrades on the roofs. The building features a low-pitched roof with large overhangs and bracketed cornice, with a decorative garland frieze on the second floor.

12. **905 N. 4th Street (NE corner of Windsor and N. 4th Streets)** The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit was built in 1909. The original chapel was designed by Muhlenberg Brothers Architects in the Italian Romanesque Revival Style and features round arches, intricate brick detailing and a beautiful rose window with elegant stained glass. The larger addition was constructed along North 4th Street in 1922 with similar architectural details and a handsome bell tower.

13. **832 & 834 North 4th Street** – These two homes built around 1890 were constructed and financed through the West Reading Savings Fund and Loan Association, one of the many period home building associations that made home ownership a reality for a greater portion of the population in Reading than in other similar sized cities. These houses are excellent examples of the folk or vernacular Queen Anne Style, interpreted in a semi-detached design. The gables have the fish-scale shingles along with the half-timbered effect found predominantly in the Stick Style. Other Stick Style elements include simple notched balusters of the porch railing, the sun-burst design in the porch gable, Eastlake-like carving of the window lintels and over-all simplicity of design.

14. **814 North 4th Street** – This home was constructed around 1908 for Daniel H. Huyett, Sr. Huyett and his brother founded the Standard Paper Box Manufacturing Co. at 443-445 Pearl Street in 1895. Between 1895 and 1910, a variety of stone-fronted homes with an eclectic blend of details dominated in the Centre Park area. This example features a second and third story bay window, intended to mimic the turrets of the Queen Anne Style, and a pedimented Classical Revival inspired porch with balustrade. Classical Revival detailing is also found in the relief of a women's face at the center of the porch pediment and in the decorative swag motifs.

15. **400 Block of Douglass Street (between N. 4th Street and Madison Avenue)** The homes on both sides of the street were constructed around 1908 by local builders Diller B. Martin and Jacob B. Schaeffer in the Queen Anne Style. Classical features of this style include rusticated stone fronts, bracketed cornices and porch pediments. The front porches feature wooden columns, balustrades and decorative pediments. Note also the fluted panels on the second-floor bay windows, the engaged columns flanking the third-floor dormer windows and the conical turret roofs.

16. **700 Block of North 5th Street** – All of the semi-detached homes in this block were built by well-known and prolific builder John Bechtel. Bechtel built 400-500 homes in the northeast and northwest section of Reading from about 1880 to 1910. Both 729 and 727 North 5th were built in 1892 specifically for Bechtel's two daughters. 729 features a front and side gable highlighting one of Bechtel's favorite design features – the sunburst. 727 features elements of the Stick Style with its patterns of vertical and horizontal boards called stickwork. Other design features of both are more typical of the Queen Anne Style.

17. **709 N. 5th Street** – William H. Luden built this Victorian Romanesque mansion in 1895 as a surprise while his wife and children spent the summer at the seashore. The new house was completely furnished upon their return. Mr. Luden of the world famous Luden Candy Company had begun the manufacture of candies in his mother's home in 1879, and twenty years later his success amply paid for this fine house with its marbled glass and handsome woodwork – note also the iron fence, bay window and period door. Luden's confections included his famous mentholated cough drops and 5th Avenue candy bars. The Luden family lived here little more than a decade. In 1907 they built an even grander residence, the palatial "Bon Air" at 1400 Hill Road, which later became Central Catholic High School.

18. **705-707 N. 5th Street** – This two-story building was built in 1927 as an automotive service station and garage for the Memmert Tire Service Co., It remained an automotive related facility, including a Studebaker dealership, for the next 33 years. Acquired in 2005, this building is now the headquarters of the Centre Park Historic District, Inc. The facility houses the Artifacts Bank (an architectural salvage operation open to the public two days a week), a preservation resource center, a neighborhood community center for meetings/ educational programs, and an office for the administrative functions of the organization. The building exhibits elements of the Arts and Crafts Style particularly evident in the large, but light and simple, brackets supporting the pent roof over the display windows, decorative wall tiles and green glazed roof tiles on the canopy roof.

19. **610 N. 5th Street** – Named “ Ellmont” and built in 1906 for Ella Hawson, this is one of the few residences in Reading built in the Beaux Arts Style. The basic body shape and hipped roof are copied from homes of the 18th Century. The exuberant details are an eclectic blend of French, English and Dutch Colonial motifs interpreted in a purely 20th Century manner. Note the classical columns, swan’s neck pedimented dormers, Flemish gable and semi-circular porch.

20. **611 N. 5th Street** – Designed by Muhlenberg Brothers Architects and built in 1898 for John and Mary McIlvain Kutz, this house is one of the finest examples of Late Queen Anne architecture left in Reading. The foursquare shape, classical trim, deck-on-hip roof and symmetry are elements of Georgian or “Colonial” details. Its ample front porch makes the house less formal as do the occasional diamond-paned “cottage” windows.

21. **606 N. 5th Street** – “Swanona” was built in 1891 by James H. Carpenter, founder of the Carpenter Steel Co., now CarTech. This “Chateausque” mansion features steeply-pitched roofs, irregular-shaped dormers, an elegant tower with conical roof, a prominent Flemish Style gable, ornamental brick and beautiful copper craftsmanship. In 1898, the house was acquired by John B. Raser, who founded the Raser Drug Store at 6th & Walnut Streets. Raser’s root beer extract was sold throughout the country.

22. **601-609 N. 5th Street** – Originally known as the Hodges Apartments, this complex was constructed by Frederick G. Hodges, founder of the Hodges Bedding Company. The complex was designed as three separate buildings connected by continuous porches on each floor of the 5th Street façade. This concept was a result of deed restrictions placed on the property by the previous owner, Sidney H. McIlvain, whose stately family mansion once stood on this land. The restrictions stated that no rowhomes were to be built, no building could be constructed within forty feet of the eastern property line of 5th Street nor within ten feet of the northern boundary: no more than four buildings could be constructed; no factory nor warehouse could be built. The apartments attracted commercial, professional and clerical tenants with small families who wanted to reside in a pleasant commuters’ neighborhood.

23. **600 N. 5th Street** – With its multi-planed roof, side turret and fish-scale shingles, this interesting home is classic Queen Anne. Historically, the structure is known as the “Bell Tower Villa” after the unusual shape of its copper-clad turret roof. It was built in 1891 for John D. Mishler, founder of the Globe Dry Goods Store on Penn Street in 1868, and manager of the Reading Academy of Music on Sixth Street from 1886 to 1907. He was very active in charitable causes and an avid patron of local theatre. In addition, Mishler helped develop the plan for Penn’s Common (City Park).

24. **601 Centre Avenue** – Built in 1925 as The First Church of Christ Scientist, this building is a fine example of the monumental Neo-Classical Style which was very popular for public buildings built in the early 20th Century. This building style is characterized by expansive flights of stairs, massive columns, cut stone masonry, and Classic Greek detailing. The leaded stained-glass windows were executed by the J.M. Kase Company of Reading, a nationally famous glass studio responsible for much of the residential art glass found in Reading.

25. **620 Centre Avenue** – “Overlook” is one of the finest examples of the French Second Empire Style to be found in the City of Reading. The mansion and carriage house were constructed in 1873 for James Hervey Sternbergh, an industrialist, inventor and founder of the Sternbergh Bolt and Nut Works. This imposing three story mansion of Flemish bond brick and cut stone was named appropriately for its elevated location, providing widespread views of the surrounding valleys to the east, south and west at that time. The iron-crested mansard roof is perhaps the most prominent element of the French Second Empire movement. The brown-stone masonry corner blocks frame the façade and add to the depth of the projecting central pavilion. This feature is highlighted by an arched double door entrance, a second-floor arched window with eyebrow-like head and is capped with a mansard roof with convex sides. In 1892, Mr. Sternbergh would build an even more elaborate mansion, “Stirling” several blocks north at 1120 Centre Avenue.

26. **630, 632, 634 Centre Avenue** – After founding their hardware manufacturing company at Fourth and Buttonwood Streets in 1867, the four Rick Brothers, Charles, Cyrus, James and John, built a row of four matching homes for their families at 630-636 Centre Avenue. Since that time, 636 has been demolished and 634 has been extensively remodeled, while 630 and 632 retain most of their original design features. The three remaining “Rick Row” homes exhibit characteristics of the Second Empire Style, known as the “French Style” during its period of popularity in the 1860’s and 1870’s. The most outstanding feature is the mansard roof which allows full use of the 3rd floor for living space.

27. **642 Centre Avenue** – Calvary United Church of Christ, was constructed in 1888-1889, with a formal dedication in 1890. The church was the first house of worship built in the Centre Park Historic District. The church was named “Calvary” because its founders thought the name and position on the main route to Charles Evans Cemetery would serve as a comfort to family members mourning the loss of their loved ones. This Gothic Revival Style structure features heavy stone facades, a steeply pitched roof with pinnacles, pointed arches and an imposing 60-foot-high corner tower.

28. **The statue of Major General David McMurtrie Gregg** was erected by the State of Pennsylvania in 1922. A West Point graduate, Gregg served with the Army of the Potomac and gave distinguished service at the Battle of Gettysburg. In 1874, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Gregg as U.S. Consul at Prague, Bohemia, an office he served for about two years. He also served as Auditor-General in Pennsylvania from 1892-1895. Gregg moved to the home town of his wife Ellen Sheaff in 1874 and lived at 108 North 4th Street in Reading. General Gregg died in 1916 and is buried in Charles Evans Cemetery.

29. **625 N. 4th Street** – This stately Georgian Revival Style mansion was designed by Charles Muhlenberg Sr. around 1900 for James Nolan, a respected mason who constructed many of the railroad bridges in eastern Pennsylvania, including the graceful stone railroad bridge over the Wissahickon Creek in Philadelphia. Mr. Nolan later gave the house to his daughter Catherine and her husband Edward Dives, of the Dives, Pomeroy and Stewart Department Store at 6th and Penn Streets in Reading. The Georgian Revival Style house features a symmetrical composition enriched with Classical Style details. The hipped roof with pedimented dormers joins the brick façade in a dentiled cornice. The colonnaded portico entry, second-story Palladian Style window, corner quoins and belt course are all representative features of the style.

30. **432 Oley Street** – This home was built in 1906 by Frank Smink, President of Reading Iron Company, as a wedding present for his daughter, and son-in-law, J. Bennet Nolan. Nolan later became a noted local historian and author. Patterned after the cottages of England, this Tudor Revival features steeply pitched roofs, stucco walls with exposed timbers, casement windows with diamond shaped panes and finely detailed brick chimneys.

31. **413 Oley Street** – Local architect, Charles H. Muhlenberg, Sr. designed and built this home for his family in 1901. His architectural firm, Muhlenberg Brothers, designed several of the mansions in the District as well as Holy Spirit Lutheran Church and the Berks County History Center at 940 Centre Avenue. Although basically Queen Anne in style, Muhlenberg added some Arts and Crafts Style details and the Shingle Style front porch.

32. **401 Oley Street** – John Huy constructed this Classical Revival Style building as a private residence in 1921. The geometry of the façade is defined through the central entrance and porch, symmetrical windows and wrought iron balconies, and east/west extensions of the main building. The porch entranceway features Doric order columns and is framed with a wrought iron balustrade. The building features a low pitched, terra-cotta tiled roof with large overhangs and a dentiled cornice.

33. **701 Centre Avenue** – Built in 1903 for the noted lawyer, Frank S. Livingood, this mansion was designed by local architect Charles H. Muhlenberg, Sr. The Jacobethan Style draws elements from late 16th Century England, including segmented facades, steep-sided triangular gables, classical entrances, rectangular windows and tall brick chimneys. In 1917, the property was purchased by Helen Quier, daughter of Jesse Hawley, Founder of the Reading Eagle Company. Since 1960 the building has been the headquarters of the Reading/Berks Chapter of the American Red Cross.

34. **708 Centre Avenue** – This exceptionally elegant Regency or Federal Revival house was constructed in 1922 for Frederick C. Hodges, a mattress manufacturer and owner of the Hodges Apartments at 601 North 5th Street, now known as Centre Park Place. In 1935, Charles R. Essick purchased the property and it became the residence of William W. Essick, head of the Pennsylvania Optical Company. Mr. Essick donated to Berks County over 700 acres of land in Bern Township which today is the location of Berks Heim and the Berks County Prison. Mr. Essick also purchased the John Barbey mansion and donated that property to the City of Reading for the purpose of creating Centre Park. This two-story structure features a low-pitched hipped roof, smooth brick finish with fine mortar joints, large window openings with stone lintel heads and louvered shutters. Take special note of the elaborate entry with paneled double doors, elliptical fan light and the Ionic capital columns that celebrate the main entrance.

35. **730 Centre Avenue** – This mansion was constructed in 1877 for Elizabeth Cullier Smith. Ms. Smith would have houses built and after living in them for a brief period, sell and construct another one. The building was sold in 1878 to the Bishop of Christ Episcopal Church. In 1888 the property was purchased by Charles Wilhelm, then President of the National Nut, Bolt and Rivet works in Reading and the Aaron Wilhelm Paint Company. The paint company became part of the Glidden Paint Company in 1919. The Wilhelm family lived here from 1888 to 1936. The mansion is designed in the Gothic Revival Style with steep pitched roofs, stone facades, pointed arches and decorative trim woodwork. The adjacent carriage house was built in 1890. Both structures feature rough stone masonry, ornate chimneys, deep eaves and carved brackets. The main structure was converted to a Bed and Breakfast in the early 1990's and now operates as the Inn at Centre Park.

36. **742 Centre Avenue** – Known locally as the Harbster Mansion, this gracious Queen Anne mansion was designed by the firm of architect Frank Furness, considered one of the world's greatest architects of the "Gilded Age" during the late 1800's. The home was constructed in 1888 for Matthan Harbster, founder of the Harbster Brothers Hardware Co., which later became the world-famous Reading Hardware Company. The three-story structure features a stately corner tower with a conical roof and turret dormers. The projecting attic gable with a second-story porch is adorned with patterned shingles. The encircling front porch with Ionic Style columns and detailed pediments defines the main entrance.

37. **746 Centre Avenue** – The original residence was constructed on this property in 1877, most likely as an Italianate Villa Style cottage. Hat manufacturer and financier Charles W. Hendel purchased the house in 1897 and hired Muhlenberg Brothers Architects to remodel and enlarge the building. The renovation continued the use of rough-cut quarried brownstone, which was more representative of the Romanesque Style popular at the time. Late Queen Anne Style features were added: the Classical Revival Style porch; deep, overhanging eaves; and the second-floor balcony with its semi-hexagonal, peaked roof which mimics a turret. Charles Hendel was the grandson of Levi Hendel, founder of the Hendel Hat Factory. Levi Hendel was an orphan who married Sara Bollman of the Bollman Hat Factory family in Adamstown from whom he learned the hat trade.

THE PROUD NEIGHBORS OF THE CENTRE PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT HOPE THAT YOU HAVE ENJOYED THIS TOUR.

The Centre Park Historic District, Inc. is a non-profit neighborhood organization whose mission is "*To promote architectural preservation and enhance neighborhood living*". In support of its purpose, the volunteer-led organization holds many events and activities in the neighborhood throughout the year. The organization also operates the Artifacts Bank, an architectural salvage operation located at its headquarters building 705-707 N 5th Street, Reading, PA 19601. The Artifacts Bank is open Sundays 9:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. and Mondays 2:00-6:00 p.m.