



Organization Chronology

1977 – City of Reading enters into an agreement with the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission to develop a comprehensive historic survey of all properties in the City.

October 1980 – Publication of historic survey identifies the Centre Park neighborhood as a potential Historic District. The name, Centre Park Historic District, is borrowed from Centre Park, an attractive focal point for the neighborhood. Centre Park is the former site of the ornate mansion built by John Barbey in the 1890's. In the 1940's, the estate was given to the City with the stipulation that an ornamental park be provided. The mansion and carriage house were demolished and the park was built. In 1976, through the use of Community Development funds, the City Planning Bureau and a Community Development construction crew of tradesmen design and reconfigure the Park as it appears today.

Early Months of 1981 – An informal group of interested residents of the Centre Park neighborhood has several meetings to discuss and study the pros & cons of the area becoming a designated historic district.

June 9, 1981 – A public meeting is held at the Historical Society of Berks County to answer questions from residents about what it means to own a property in a designated historic district. Guest speakers include Mayor Karen Miller, Director of the Bureau of Planning, Robert Bartmann, Community Preservation Specialist, Michel Lefevre, and Chairman of the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB), Andrew Maier.

June 1981 – Immediately following the June 9th meeting, volunteers begin to gather signatures to petition the Mayor and City Council to create the Centre Park Historic District.

Late 1981 – Early 1982 – The Centre Park Citizens Association is involved in trying to dissuade Calvary Church of the Nazarene from demolishing the former Pomeroy Mansion at 615 Centre Ave. Letters are written to the Pastor of Calvary Church, the General Supervisor of the Philadelphia District Church of the Nazarene, Mayor Miller, members of City Council, the Zoning Hearing Board and the Reading Eagle Times. Unfortunately this effort is to no avail and the building is razed. However, this further reinforces the organization's resolve to create the Historic District.

February 1982 – A Steering Committee is formed; officers are elected and officially name the organizing group The Citizens for the Centre Park Historic District. As of this date 336 affirmative signatures have been acquired for the petition.

March – June 1982 – Monthly meetings are held by this group and a number of community projects are generated. Guided tours of the proposed District are held. During Preservation Week, May 9th-15th, 1982, 230 children and adults participate on tours. Community cleanups are held in May and June. At the May 20th, 1982, meeting it is reported that 482 signatures have been obtained, and by the end of June the total is 599.

July 13, 1982 – The Citizens for the Centre Park Historic District present to Mayor Karen Miller and City Council a petition with 611 signatures, or 73% of the 840 property owners in the proposed Centre Park Historic District, asking for protection under the provisions of the Reading Historic District Ordinance.

August 4, 1982 – A public meeting is held at Calvary United Church of Christ by Mayor Miller, members of Council and the Citizens for the Centre Park Historic District. The purpose of the meeting is to determine whether those property owners who signed the petition understand their rights and responsibilities under the Reading Historic District Ordinance. About 130 property owners attend. Through their questions and comments, most indicate they want City Council to take the steps necessary to amend the Historic District Ordinance to designate the Centre Park neighborhood as the City's third Historic District.

August 17, 1982 – A new Executive Committee and Steering Committee is nominated and voted upon, essentially becoming the first Board of Directors. The goals and objectives include education of residents and public at large through regular public meetings, lectures, walking tours and special events; community and civic projects in the neighborhood; a Neighborhood Crime Watch; writing of by-laws, incorporation and non-profit status for the organization.

September 26, 1982 – One of the first social events held in the district is a Victorian Picnic at the Bell Tower, 606 N. 5th St. Victorian games, music and walking tours are among the activities. Picnickers bring their own cold supper, and the organization provides wine and desserts.

Wednesday, October 28, 1982 – Following a public meeting, City Council unanimously votes to approve the creation of the Centre Park Historic District. At the meeting, representatives of Citizens for Centre Park and the Callowhill Citizens Association describe the new District as “one of Reading’s most precious jewels.”

December 8, 1982 – By resolution, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission certifies the Centre Park Historic District as a state-approved Historic District.

July 19, 1983 – United States Department of the Interior certifies the Historic District for purposes pursuant to the Tax Reform Act of 1976 and the Economic Recovery Act of 1981.

August 5, 1983 – State of Pennsylvania approves application for Articles of Incorporation under the name of Centre Park Historic District, Inc.

August 29, 1983 – By-laws are developed and approved for the Centre Park Historic District, Inc. Under these by-laws the stated purpose of the new organization is *“To preserve the historical and architectural significance of the Centre Park Historic District and the City of Reading. To increase and diffuse knowledge and appreciation of such sites and structures through appropriate preservation efforts. To acquire, sell, lease, manage, preserve and restore and/or develop sites and buildings of historical and architectural significance in the Centre Park Historic District and for any lawful purpose permitted by the Non-Profit Corporation Law, as amended.”* A twelve member Board of Directors will now run the organization.

October 4, 1983 – Nominations for Board members and officers in the new corporation are presented and approved. General membership and dues for the organization are discussed. By December, membership information and applications are ready for distribution to all Centre Park residents.

January 1984 – Membership drive begins. By the end of 1984, approximately 70 memberships are received. **1983 & 1984** – The organization continues having regular walking tours, community clean-ups and Preservation Week events. It also participates in many activities with the City’s other two Historic Districts such as, the Historic Reading Run, wine tasting fund raisers at the Historical Society, formation of the Reading Preservation Alliance, Scenic River Days, and the publication of a Walking Tour Brochure for the three Historic Districts.

December 8, 1985 – The first Christmas House Tour is held in the Centre Park Historic District and over 500 people attend. This activity becomes an annual event and has drawn as many as 1000 people.

March 1986 – An important amendment to the by-laws is approved – 25% of money acquired through fund raising activities shall be donated for ends consistent with the purposes of the organization. Due to the acquisition in 2005 and subsequent restoration expenses of the CPHD headquarters building, this amendment to the by-laws was suspended until such time that it would again become financially feasible. * (See note at end)

August 1987 – The first Arts & Antiques Fair is held with approximately 20 Artists, Craftsmen and Antique Dealers displaying and selling their wares to several hundred attendees. This event grows for many years before reluctantly being discontinued in 2011 because of low vendor participation.

April 2, 1988 – First Easter Egg Hunt is held for 68 children of the District.

June 4, 1988 – First Flea Market held in conjunction with the American Red Cross. This also becomes an annual event. In 2006 a second Flea Market in the fall is added to the Calendar of Events.

February 1989 – The Centre Park Historic District takes possession of the Artifacts Bank. The Artifacts Bank was started and run by the Callowhill Citizens Association. Items are moved from the Oritsky Building to a basement in the 700 block of North 3rd St. The need for more adequate space necessitates moving the Bank to its present location at 705-707 N 5th St. in January of 1992.

September 12, 1990 – Centre Park Historic District, Inc. is recognized as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization by the I.R.S.

Fall 1990 – The CPHD Board discusses funding the purchase of nine new lampposts to be installed around the circular planter in Centre Park. The existing “Lollipop” lights are inefficient, contemporary in style and easily broken. A more Victorian style is deemed more appropriate for the neighborhood.

July 13, 1991 – First Garden Tour & Ice Cream Social is held as a co-sponsored event with The Historical Society of Berks County. Approximately 300 people take the Tour. This becomes an annual event, usually drawing 200 to 400 people.

1992 – Centre Park Historic District celebrates its Tenth Anniversary with a year long program of special activities. One of these activities, “Movies in the Park”, becomes a yearly event for the children of the District with programs every Monday night in July and August. To further celebrate the Anniversary, the Board funds the design and installation of a Centre Park Historic District identification sign, which is placed in Centre Park along Centre Ave.

Fall 1992· Nine new Victorian style lights are installed around the circular planter in Centre Park. Through the efforts of Councilman Ron DiBenedetto, City money is allocated to pay for the lights, freeing up CPHD money for other projects that follow.

December 1992 – An evaluation of City statuary in 1991 reveals that the Major General David McMurtrie Gregg statue at Centre Ave, 4th & Oley Sts. is in desperate need of restoration. The CPHD Board makes a commitment to do whatever is necessary to help fund the rehabilitation. The Board agrees to set up a separate account to receive contributions and starts the fund with \$1,065.57 (the money dedicated to preservation efforts from the previous year’s proceeds). All necessary funds to restore the statue are received from the State through the efforts of Rep. Tom Caltigarone and the Historical Society of Berks County. On September 6, 1995, the statue is removed to Lancaster for restoration.

1993 – By the end of the Tenth Anniversary Celebration, memberships have risen to over 225.

May 16, 1993. State of Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations certifies Centre Park Historic District as an official charitable organization.

1994 and Beyond – Centre Park participates financially and with much volunteer labor in the City of Reading Adopt-A-Tree program. Approximately 500 trees have been planted in and around the neighborhood since 1994.

May 20, 1995 – First Old House Fair is held at the Artifacts Bank. Experts in old house restoration, products and services have displays and demonstrations. This event continues for four more years before being discontinued.

June 1, 1996 – The members of the CPHD Board organize unveiling and re-dedication ceremony of the General Gregg statue. The ceremonies consist of Civil War Re-enactors, a brass band playing Civil War music, guest speakers and refreshments at the Historical Society of Berks County following the program. The money raised by CPHD Board for the General Gregg statue is kept in a fund designated for its continued

maintenance. In the summer of 2000, most of that money is used to clean and re-wax the statue.

April 1997 – Centre Park Historic District becomes a member of the Berks County Museum Council. In 2011 this organization officially changes its name to the Heritage Council of Berks County.

September 1997 – A Neighborhood Crime Watch is created following a very successful Community Interest Meeting sponsored by Centre Park Historic District. The Board of Directors pledge to finance the District 7 Crime Watch as required. Crime Watch members, many of who are also Centre Park Historic District members, currently perform many patrol hours a month.

1998 – During Reading's 250 Anniversary, CPHD members participate in many of the celebration activities: March 30th City Birthday Party, May 16th Parade, June 13th & 14th River Days. As a remembrance of the Bicentennary, the CPHD Board funds the development of a new landscape area at the corner of Centre Ave. & Douglass Sts. in the Park.

Fall 1999 – Board of Directors approve spending more than \$11,000 to purchase new metal benches, matching trash receptacles, and new in-ground lights for the Centre Park sign as further improvements for the Park.

October 27, 2000 – Halloween Masquerade Party is held for CPHD members at Adrienne's Inn at Centre Park (The Wilhelm Mansion). For several years this was an annual event.

2001 – The CPHD Board of Directors continues its commitment to making improvements in Centre Park, allocating \$7,800 for tree removal and trimming plus an additional \$9,400 to upgrade the electrical service in the Park.

2002 – 20th Anniversary of the establishment of Centre Park Historic District is marked by a yearlong celebration of special events, kicked off with a Recognition Dinner at Stirling Guest Hotel, honoring the Founders and Past Presidents of the Centre Park Historic District, Inc. As part of the celebration, funds to erect a new Centre Park sign to conceal the electrical box at the corner of 4th & Douglass Sts. are approved. Installation takes place in April.

April 1, 2002 – The Board of Directors establishes the Centre Park Garden Club as a committee under the umbrella of the organization. Since that time, Garden Club volunteers have been responsible for creating and maintaining flowerbeds in Centre Park and Gateway Park.

April 20, 2002 – Centre Park Historic District members participate in a parade celebrating the 250th Anniversary of Berks County.

June 29, 2002 – The first International Covered Dish Social is held in Centre Park. Friends and neighbors bring their favorite ethnic or regional food to share. Live music by three different musical groups help make the event a success. This event is held for three more years before being discontinued.

March 30, 2001 thru July 2002 – During this time, current & past CPHD Board members meet to develop a Strategic Action Plan for the organization. Adoption of Centre Park Historic District's first Strategic Action Plan takes place on **August 5, 2002**. Over the next 10 years the Plan is revised and updated several times.

November 4, 2002 – The Executive Committee submits a resolution proposing the creation and engagement of a part-time Executive Director for the organization. The Board of Directors approves the creation of the position and appoints Michael Lauter as the first CPHD Executive Director.

November 7, 2002 – A Neighborhood Meeting is held at the Historical Society of Berks County attended by approximately 60 people. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the newly adopted Strategic Action Plan and to solicit input, concerns, and matters that the CPHD, Inc. should be focused on. Those in attendance were highly complimentary about the organization and its current efforts in helping to preserve and renew the neighborhood.

February 2003 – The Board of Directors is made aware that the building in which the organization rents space for the Artifacts Bank will be going up for sale. The Board directs the Planning Committee to begin investigating options. In August of 2003, the Planning Committee presented the Board with three options concerning the Artifacts Bank operation: 1. Get out of the Artifacts Bank business, 2. Acquire the building it is in, or 3. Rent or acquire another suitable building. After much discussion the Board felt that the Artifacts Bank operation was an important aspect of our mission and therefore should be kept if a way could be found to acquire a building without draining the finances of the organization. It directed the Planning Committee to continue investigating location possibilities, acquisition/renovation costs and the potential for funding sources. Applications for grants to acquire the building are submitted to the city CDBG program, Preservation PA loan/grant program and Pennsylvania DCED. This process continues for nearly two years.

December 2003 – Centre Park Historic District Block Captain Committee is formed, with the mission “ To improve the quality of life in the Centre Park Historic District by fostering a sense of unity, a spirit of involvement and an attitude of commitment to our neighborhood on a block-by-block basis.” Over the next several years this committee is instrumental in placing trash receptacles at several key street corners and pushing for the expansion of the street sweeping program into the greater Centre Park neighborhood.

April 2004 – The Centre Park Garden Club begins work to improve the triangular plot of ground at the confluence of Centre Avenue. and North 5th Street. This project is done in several phases over three years. The work completed included removal of scrub trees, installation of a fence, rejuvenation of the existing flagpole, planting of arborvitae, ground cover and perennials, installation of a water source, and the creation of a brick & cobblestone path between N 5th St. and Centre Ave.

November 24, 2004 – In order to prevent other offers to buy the building pending the final approval of a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from the City and a loan/grant from Preservation Pennsylvania, the Executive Committee unanimously approves a purchase offer on 705-707 N 5th St.. The Board of Directors at its December Board meeting then approves the action of the Executive Committee.

January 20, 2005 – A special meeting of the Board of Directors is called to discuss and vote on whether or not to proceed with the acceptance of the finalized CDBG agreement and the Preservation PA loan/grant. After much discussion the Board votes to pursue the agreements with the City and Preservation PA to purchase and renovate 705-707 N 5th St. to be used as the CPHD headquarters for the following uses: expanded Artifacts Bank, office space, community meeting space, and a preservation resource center.

March 30, 2005 – Settlement is made on 705-707 N 5th St. The Centre Park Historic District, Inc. now has a place to call home. Work at the headquarters begins immediately on several fronts. The Artifacts Bank committee begins to rearrange and improve the space in the Artifacts Bank. The hours at the Bank are also expanded. The Building Committee begins to remove unwanted walls, drop ceilings, flooring, paneling, etc in preparation for the renovation of the front office and the construction of the Community Room and handicap accessible bathroom.

April 17, 2005 – With some help from CPHD, Inc., the Berks County Earth Day Committee moves its annual Earth Day Celebration from City Park to Centre Park. This event is held in Centre Park for several more years before moving to Riverfront Park.

May 25, 2005 – The first Preservation Month Celebration is held by the Centre Park Historic District. Certificates of Recognition are given to property owners who applied for a Certificate of Appropriateness and completed exterior renovations during the past year. Also instituted were two annual Community Service Awards. One award is given for an individual and one for a business or organization who have “generously and substantially contributed by deeds or actions to the overall good of the Centre Park Historic District.”

November 2005 – February 2006 – The front room of the headquarters is painted, electrical upgrades made, new heating ducts installed, and the vestibule is built. (Note: The schoolhouse lights installed in this room were salvaged from Whitner's Department Store by the Artifacts Bank committee prior to the stores demolition early that year.

January 15, 2006 – The Centre Park Historic District, Inc. receives an endowment from the estate of John & Ethlyn Slifko. The money is to be used as a living memorial for the planting of trees within the greater Centre Park area.

June 8, 2006 – The Centre Park Historic District participates in the festivities surrounding the first Pennsylvania Triple Crown Cycling Race held in the City of Reading. Free hot dogs, sodas & snacks are distributed to visitors who watch the cyclists race by Centre Park. The CPHD continues its participation for the remaining two years that this race is held in Reading.

August 14, 2006 – Construction on the Community Meeting Room and handicap accessible bathroom at our headquarters begins. Due to several setbacks, the construction work is not completed until the end of December. About this time a section of the perma-stone façade falls off the headquarters building. Closer examination reveals that other sections of the façade are also in danger of coming off. Over the next several months, bids to restore the façade are obtained, and sources of funding are investigated.

February 3, 2007 – The Centre Park Historic District's 25th Anniversary year kicks off with a Gala Celebration Dinner at Stirling. Students from the Curtis Institute provide musical entertainment.

February 17, 2007 – Following several painting sessions during the previous month, Centre Park volunteers lay donated floor tile in the new Community Room.

March 13, 2007 – The first official use of the new Community Room is a “How To” seminar on faux finishing conducted by faux finishing expert Al Dungan. After this meeting, the CPHD Board of Directors is informed that public meetings such as this should not take place until an occupancy permit is issued. Investigation into this permit results in the need for further upgrades to the building including a second or emergency egress, two-hour firewalls separating the Community Meeting Room and the Artifacts Bank, and a fire alarm/emergency lighting system. The search for funds to accomplish these projects begins immediately.

April 2007 – City Council approves a commercial façade improvement grant to remove the deteriorated perma-stone and restore the front façade to its original 1927 appearance. It also waives the normal 50% match. A grant from the Wyomissing Foundation is also received to help with this project.

July 2007 – Reading Pride chooses Centre Park as the location for its first Reading Pride Celebration. This event continues as an annual event in Centre Park.

August 2007 – Work begins on the headquarters building exterior restoration project. Work includes an entire new rubber roof, restoration of the front façade, and rebuilding of the front canopy.

November & December 2007 – After the completion of the exterior restoration work, volunteers paint trim, install ceramic tile in the vestibule and lay carpet tile in the front room. Office furniture donated by Sovereign Bank is installed, and the Garden Club improves the property adjoining our headquarters with flowering perennials and a tree. This work is completed in time for the building to be included in the 2007 Christmas House Tour.

June 2008 – Centre Park Historic District receives national recognition when This Old House Magazine announces that it has chosen the District as one of the eight best places to buy an old house in the United States. The CPHD is featured in the July/August issue. Acknowledgement and kudos come from far and wide.

July – August 2008 – Music in Centre Park series, sponsored by the John P. Feeney Funeral Home, starts and becomes an annual event.

August 4, 2008 – After nearly a year of review, a revised and updated Strategic Action Plan is adopted.

November 2, 2008 – The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society awards the Centre Park Historic District Garden Club with the 2008 Community Greening Award in recognition of the Garden Club's efforts to beautify "Gateway Park" at the confluence of Centre Ave. & N 5th St.

February 2009 – As a new way to market the District and to better connect with residents and the community, the Board of Directors approves setup of a Facebook page. By the end of March there are 200 friends signed up.

April 2009 – Preservation Officer Amy Johnson begins the "Ask Amy Program" in CPHD. This program has Ms. Johnson visiting the District on the 2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month for two hours. The first hour is spent patrolling the District; the second hour she is at the CPHD headquarters meeting with historic district property owners answering questions and providing advice.

May 25, 2009 – Following their participation in the Reading Memorial Day Parade, Drum Corps Associates World Champion Reading Buccaneers Drum & Bugle Corps performs a mini concert in Centre Park to the delight of visitors and residents of the District.

August 24, 2009 – City Council approves a CDBG grant to help CPHD with funding the upgrades necessary to receive an occupancy permit. Negotiations to acquire an easement allowing for the second egress begin with one of our neighbors. After nearly a year of trying, these negotiations fail. Luckily, a year later an easement is signed with another neighbor.

September – November 2009 – After completion of a fire wall between the Community Meeting Room and the Artifacts Bank, volunteers build new molding racks, move the spindle bins, and remove the top half of the interior south wall in the Artifacts Bank. Removal of the wall opens up the windows allowing much more light into the Bank and also allows access to the windows to replace those that are cracked or broken.

October 5, 2009 – The Board of Directors approves formation of a committee to do a feasibility study to consider a Neighborhood Improvement District (NID) for the area. At a community meeting held the following April the results of this study are presented. The initiative is not well received and the NID plan is shelved. Fund raising events were severely impacted by bad weather. The present board convenes several emergency meetings with past board members to gather ideas and strategies to address the situation. Several ideas include selling Artifacts Bank items on eBay, a direct request of the membership for funds to match the CDBG grant and letters to local foundations and businesses. These efforts do result in temporally improving the financial situation of the organization.

June 19, 2010 – The Artifacts Bank establishes a satellite location at the Adamstown Antique Mall to help sell more items and to help spread the word that the Artifacts Bank exists.

January 2011 – A program is started to send information packets to realtors listing properties for sale in the Centre Park Historic District. These packets include information regarding Reading's Historic District Ordinance, the history of the Centre Park Historic District and the CPHD organization, its events and activities.

March 19, 2011 – Having finally secured an easement agreement with the owner of 716 Church Street, work begins to dismantle racks and shelving at the rear wall of the Artifacts Bank. This is followed in April by the installation of the emergency egress door.

May 2, 2011 – The Board approves forming a committee whose task is to investigate costs, review options and to raise funds for the restoration of the fountain in Centre Park.

May 23, 2011 – After several months of discussion and working out details, the Artifacts Bank Committee begins to accept select items on consignment for sale at the Artifacts Bank.

June 24, 25 – The Garden Tour takes on a new dimension with the addition of a Friday evening tour that includes a wine tasting.

July – August 2011 –Volunteers work during this time to complete many projects at the CPHD headquarters; painting of some interior and exterior walls, restoration work on several windows and the rehabilitation of two display cases.

September 2011 – A contract between CPHD, the City of Reading and ESCO Inc. is produced for the installation of the Fire Alarm / Emergency Lighting and Security system at the CPHD headquarters. Installation of the emergency lights begins in October; the fire /security alarm system installation begins in January 2012.

December 2011 – Several new activities take place; Christmas trees are sold at the Artifacts Bank, “Christmas in the Park” is held on December 3, wherein residents enjoy popcorn, hot chocolate and treats from Santa, followed by the official lighting of the Centre Park Christmas Tree, and a champagne brunch is held at Adrienne’s Inn at Centre Park prior to the start of the Christmas House Tour.

2012 – The Centre Park Historic District celebrates the 30th anniversary of its formation with a yearlong list of activities kicked off with a Gala Celebration at the Stirling Guest Hotel on January 28, 2012

Not mentioned in this chronology were the many general membership and community interest meetings held several times each year that provided the members and the community at large with interesting and informative speakers on a variety of topics.

- ***Of special note*** – Since the inception of the Centre Park Historic District, Inc., this organization has donated over \$60,000.00 to various projects, not only in the Centre Park Historic District, but also throughout the City and beyond. The following are some of those projects: Restoration of the Stained Glass Windows in City Hall, Save the Astor Theater Fund, restoration of the City Greenhouse and reestablishment of the Rose Garden in City Park, Historic Charleston SC Relief Fund, restoration of the Christopher Columbus statue, preservation of historic documents at the Register of Wills office, Historical Society of Berks County building expansion, tree planting project in the District, restoration and maintenance of the Maj. Gen. David McMurtrie Gregg statue, BCTV programming sponsorship & Capital Campaign, Reading’s 250th Anniversary Celebration, Women Veterans Memorial, Reading Volunteer Crime Watch, Reading Beautification and the Centre Park and Gateway Park improvement projects listed earlier.

In addition to some of these projects, our volunteer members undertake the many events and activities held every year in the Centre Park Historic District. On average over 2500 volunteer hours are donated every year for the benefit of the District and the City. In 30 years that equals approximately 75 thousand volunteer hours.

Thank you to all those who have helped make this a successful organization, a model neighborhood, and a great place to call home!