



Presents

An Online Self-Guided Walking Tour of Historic Society Hill

We hope you enjoy this pleasant diversion during our national emergency.

During the current COVID-19 stay-at-home order, we are permitted to go outside for walks, as long as we practice social distancing and stay at least six feet apart from each other.

While we are mindful of staying in place and avoiding crowds, consider this: a self-guided tour of some of our iconic buildings and houses. This tour gives the opportunity to get outside and walk for much-needed exercise. It is especially good for one or two people, making it easier to keep the required social distance. Color photos and descriptions will provide enlightenment about building facades you have seen but may not know well.

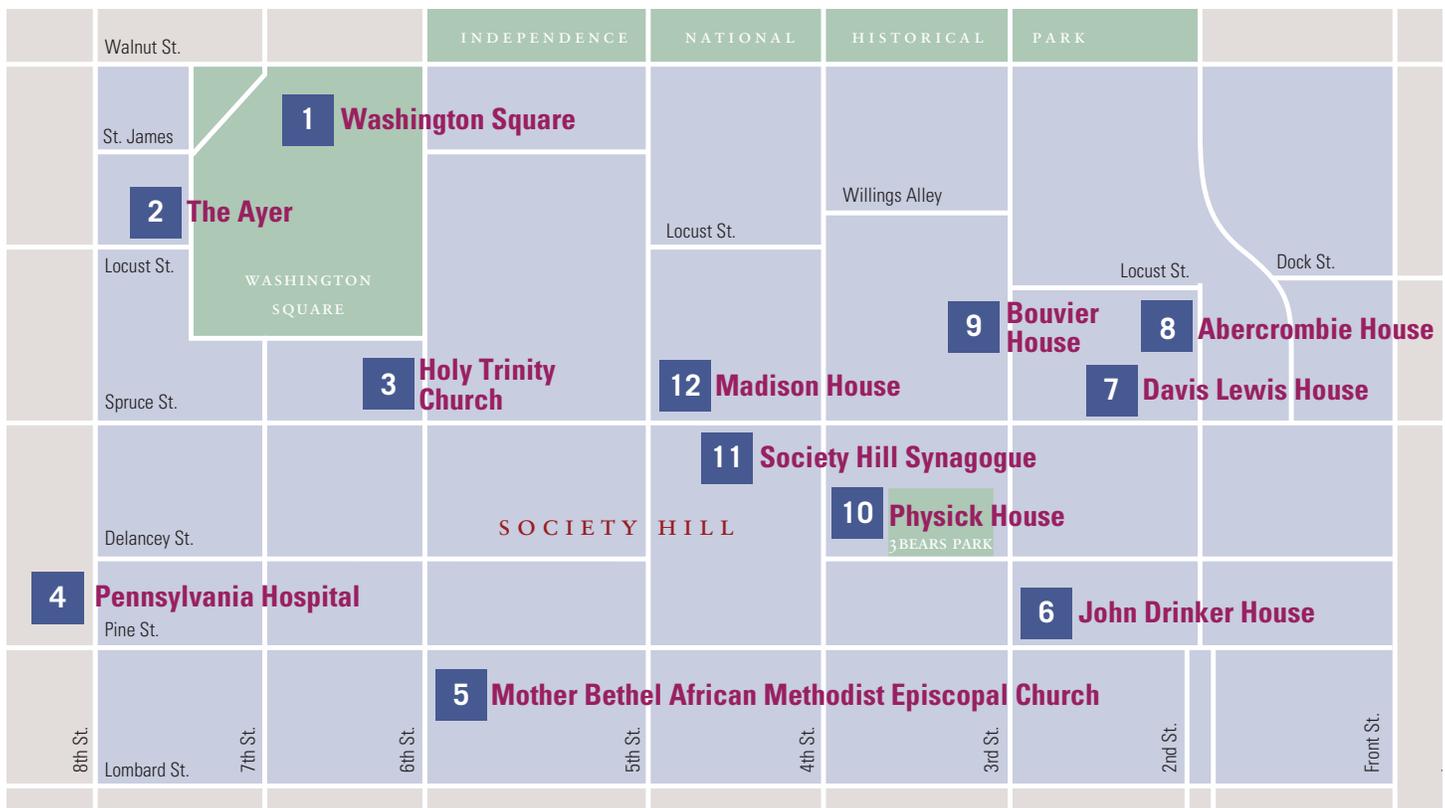
Although the tour is shown in one order, you can start anywhere and see the entire list of 12 stops. See map below.

As you may know, Society Hill has one of the largest inventories of 18th- and 19th-century buildings in the United States, a nice contrast with our many contemporary 20th- and 21st-century ones. The grid pattern, used by the ancient Romans, is the basis for the Philadelphia plan. The grid makes finding your way around quite simple—you can't get lost in Philadelphia. North-south streets are numbered 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc. and east-west streets are named after trees: Walnut, Locust, Spruce, Pine, Lombard.



Walking Tour Map Key

- 1 *Washington Square: Between 6th & 7th, Walnut & Spruce Sts*
- 2 *N.W. Ayer & Son: 204-212 West Washington Square*
- 3 *Holy Trinity Church: 6th & Spruce Street*
- 4 *Pennsylvania Hospital: 801-845 Pine Street*
- 5 *Mother Bethel AME Church: 419 South 6th Street*
- 6 *John Drinker House: 241 Pine Street*
- 7 *Davis-Lenox House: 217 Spruce Street*
- 8 *Abercrombie House: 270 South 2nd Street*
- 9 *Bouvier Houses: 258, 260, 262 South 3rd Street*
- 10 *Physick House: 321 South 4th Street*
- 11 *Society Hill Synagogue: 418 Spruce Street*
- 12 *Madison House: 429 Spruce Street*



1 Washington Square

Between 6th & 7th Streets,
Walnut & Spruce Streets



Originally called Southeast Square, it was established in 1682 as one of the five original squares set aside as parks for the public by William Penn's surveyor, Thomas Holme. It took nearly 150 years before Penn's vision of a public park became a reality.

The park has served as a potter's field and a pasture. It was a burial ground, with over 2,000 Revolutionary war soldiers buried here, as well as yellow fever victims. By the early 19th century, the city began laying out a formal park with gravel sidewalks, benches, a fence and over 200 trees. Renamed in honor of George Washington, the park opened to the public in 1825. The park was redesigned in 1880s and again in 1915 with the walkway pattern we see today.

2 The Ayer

204-212 West Washington Square

This Art Deco-style building with its ornate bronze doors on the west side of Washington Square was headquarters for N.W. Ayer & Son, once Philadelphia's largest advertising company. The building was designed by Ralph B. Bencker in 1929. Some of the notable slogans developed by the firm include: "When it rains, it pours," for Morton Salt in 1912; "A Diamond is forever," for DeBeers in 1947; and "Be all you can be," for the U.S. Army in 1981.



The building now houses 50 condominiums with restaurants on the first floor.

3 Holy Trinity Church

6th & Spruce Streets



The German Catholic community built this church so they could pray and teach in German. This fine example of Flemish bond brick work with glazed headers was built in 1789 as the first parish for a specific national group in this country. The parishioners also established the first Catholic orphan asylum in America in 1797. Although fire damage led to alterations in 1860 and again in 1890, the church's three-aisle plan, polygonal chancel, and east-facing altar has changed little from its original appearance.

4 Pennsylvania Hospital

801-845 Pine Street



The nation's oldest hospital was founded in 1751 by Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Thomas Bond. This was an institution for treating the city's poor, not the well-to-do, who were treated in their homes. The hospital complex, designated a National Historic Landmark, is composed of a number of buildings of various types and dates as well as planned landscaping and grounds.

The Pine Street building, built in 1794-1805, is the historic centerpiece of the complex and is an outstanding example of Federal architecture. On the roof, note the balustrade around the skylight of the nation's oldest surgical amphitheater, called "the dreaded oval room."

On the 8th Street side is a large brick archway that was an entry for horse-drawn ambulances.

5 Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

419 South 6th Street



Designated a National Historic Landmark, the church was founded by Richard Allen, a former slave who purchased his own freedom in 1783 and began preaching the gospel in Pennsylvania and nearby states. Bethel Church was dedicated in July 1794 on land that Allen purchased

in 1791. By the 1810s, the church had more than 1,000 members. It served as an “Underground Railroad” to freedom in the 19th Century. Today, the church continues to have a large, active congregation.

The present structure, built 1889-90 with a Romanesque limestone façade, is the fourth church on this lot, and is located on the oldest real estate in the US continuously owned by African Americans. Note the large stained glass windows on the side elevations and the four-story tower.

6 John Drinker House

241 Pine Street

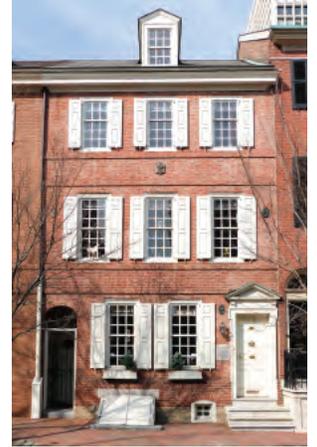
John Drinker, brickmason, early Society Hill developer, and builder of Drinker’s Court, built this house as his home in 1765. Descended from this family was Catherine Drinker Bowen, a well-known author and historian. This house, with its simple paneled door and pent eave, is typical of the earliest Philadelphia brick houses. It was restored in 1956.



7 Davis-Lenox House

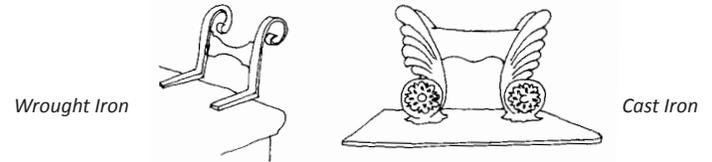
217 Spruce Street

The Davis-Lenox House was built in 1758 by James Davis, a member of the Carpenters’ Company. In 1783, an additional floor was added by Major David Lenox, who served as an officer in the Continental Army. Lenox was wounded and captured at Fort Washington in 1776, and was held as a prisoner by the British until his exchange in 1778. After the war he entered mercantile life in Philadelphia and became president of the Bank of the United States. The house is Georgian in style; the pediment over the door, boot scraper, and marble stairs are original to the house.



Boot Scrapers

As some streets were unpaved, boot scrapers were essential for removing mud. Found near the front steps or incorporated in the stair railings, they were made of wrought iron through the early-19th century. Later they were cast in molds.



Abercrombie House

270 South 2nd Street

When the prosperous Scottish sea captain James Abercrombie built this four-and-a-half-story Georgian house around 1759, it was one of the tallest dwellings in Philadelphia. It has an unusual decked gable roof with balustrade, which must have once afforded a fine view of the port.

The house, used as a warehouse early in the 20th century, was restored in the 1960s and occupied by a toy museum for many years before returning to residential use.



9 Bouvier Houses

258-260-262 South 3rd Street

Among the very few brownstones in Society Hill, this group was built in 1849-50 on land once occupied by the elaborate Bingham Mansion.



Built by Michael Bouvier, a French immigrant, marble and mahogany merchant, and great-great grandfather of Jacqueline

Bouvier Kennedy Onassis, the massive three-and-a-half-story houses are Greek Revival/Italianate in style which was the height of fashion at the time. Note the stone entablatures over the doors and windows, the wood cornices, cast iron rails on the balconies, and the service cellar entrances.

10 Physick House

321 South 4th Street



The elegant Federal mansion is one of only two free-standing houses remaining in Society Hill. It was built in 1786 for Henry Hill, a wealthy Madeira wine importer, who lived there until his death from the yellow fever epidemic in 1793. The house was purchased by Dr. Philip Syng Physick in 1815 where he lived until his death in 1837. Dr. Physick, known during his lifetime as the "Father of American Surgery," was responsible for the advancement of surgical methods and improvements in surgical instrumentation.

The mansion was restored and made a house museum by The Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in the mid-1960s. The grand furnishings are of the Regency period. In 1976, the house was designated a National Historic Landmark.

11 Society Hill Synagogue

418 Spruce Street



Originally the Spruce Street Baptist Church, built in 1829-30, this building was converted to a synagogue by Romanian Jews in 1910 during the Jewish immigration period from Eastern Europe.

In 1851, the façade of the church was altered to an eclectic Italian Revival style, instead of the usual Gothic or Palladian style of the other churches of the day. The imposing granite stairway leads up to the main floor where the sanctuary is located.

The facade was restored in 1968 working from original drawings found at the Philadelphia Contributionship. Although the building has gone through changes in stewardship and configuration, its basic mission as a haven for religious freedom and enlightened social action has remained.

12 Madison House

429 Spruce Street

Dolley Payne Todd was widowed at a young age when her husband, John, died in the yellow fever epidemic of 1793. According to some accounts, in May of 1794, Aaron Burr, a friend of the family, introduced Dolley to James Madison, at Madison's request, and they were married that year.



The Madisons lived at 429 Spruce Street during his term in the U.S. Congress from 1795 to 1796. During those times the house was a hub of social and political activity.