

The History of Red Hill

Originally a part of Upper Hanover Township, the borough of Red Hill was first known as Hillegassville in honor of the founding family. The little community came to be called Red Hill in the late 19th century as a reflection of the prevalence of red clay soil in the area. The borough was incorporated in 1902.

The first settlers in the area were primarily German immigrants. During the 1800s, the community included innkeepers, blacksmiths, storekeepers and a coffin maker, most of whom were located along Main Street. The rural character was expressed by a farm tract that divided the village into lower and upper ends.

Route 29 (Main Street) was first laid out in 1735 as part of "The Great Road Leading to Philadelphia." In 1851, the Green Lane and Goschenhoppen Turnpike Company was formed to privatize road expansion and improvements. This effort led to the development of "The Great Road" through the middle of this community. The completion of the Perkiomen Railroad in 1874 made the little village more appealing for residence and industry. In the 1880s and 1890s cigar manufacturers set to work creating an industrial economy and a residential enclave to house the workers drawn from surrounding farms.

At the time of incorporation in 1902, some 95% of the population was employed in the cigar industry. This single industrial base essentially built the community we see today. But by the late 1920s, the industry that created this town was rapidly disappearing as a result of large-scale mass production elsewhere and national advertising campaigns by large cigar and cigarette companies.

By the 50th anniversary of the incorporation of the borough in 1952, eleven different industries were established in Red Hill manufacturing brooms, bags, clothing, rugs, metal stampings, silk ribbon and fabrics, dairy products and baked goods.

Other items of interest about Red Hill:

- Borough utilities included the Red Hill Electric Co., Ltd. which installed electric light facilities in borough in 1910. Power came from the plant in Pennsburg until 1923, when Red Hill's interest was sold to Pennsylvania Power and Light Company (PP&L) for \$16,000. Water Service was first provided in 1909 with the purchase of 71 acres of land in Upper Milford, Lehigh County for a reservoir. An agreement with Pennsburg in 1911 allowed for the water to flow to the borough line through Pennsburg's pipes from its source near Hereford. A shared water source continues to this day.
- The popular Red Hill Band, organized in 1900, still provides community band concerts throughout the area. First rehearsals were in the L. B. Miller cigar factory building. Later practices moved to such locations as a carriage shop, a barn and a room over the Fire House. The first official engagement was at an indoor fair at Sumneytown in February, 1901, for the modest fee of \$10.
- Horse racing and horse sales brought fame to little Red Hill. Horse racing began in the early 1890s in a track about ¼ mile off Main Street behind the Turkey Hill convenience store. Seating could accommodate 200 people and trotting races were held once a month. By the early 1900s races came to an end. The nearby horse bazaar, on the grounds of today's Turkey Hill, then the Red Hill Hotel, were conducted from the early 1880s until 1920, drawing upwards of 1000 for the monthly auctions.

Red Hill Borough



Self-guided Tour

Tour #3

of a series of 7 tours



Cover Artwork

"Back-A-Ways", Watercolor

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Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center
Pennsburg, Pennsylvania

Red Hill Self-Guided Tour

WE ASK THAT YOU RESPECT THE PRIVACY OF THE OWNERS OF THE TOUR SITES BY REMAINING ON SIDEWALKS OR ROADWAYS WHEN VIEWING THE SITES, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED.

A significant portion of Main and Sixth streets in Red Hill has been designated a National Registered Historic District. In addition to being a guide through the heritage of the community, this tour is also an introduction to the specifics of being a National Registered Historic District.

The architecture in the Red Hill district represents industrial (post-1880s) and pre-industrial (pre-1880s). Pre-industrial architecture was primarily non-professionally designed. A distinctive, pre-industrial PA German building style found in Red Hill and throughout the Upper Perkiomen Valley community makes use of slate-shingles, with wood siding and a porch.

Examples of 1890s industrial buildings and workers' housing are found in this district. The brick mill buildings and two-and-one-half-story single and double houses, embellished with ornate millwork trim on their porches, dominate the streetscape of Red Hill. Although this style of architecture is also found in Pennsburg, East Greenville and Green Lane, the largest collection of Victorian style buildings in the area is located in Red Hill along Main Street and East Sixth Street. Both the slate-shingled houses and brick mills and workers' houses convey the flavor and character of the Upper Perkiomen Valley at the turn of the 20th century.

Red Hill has been well preserved, and showing the transition from a turnpike village to a cigar manufacturing center at the end of the 19th century. This rich history also represents an important regional lifestyle. For these reasons, Red Hill has a place on the National Register of Historic Places.

Park at Redner's Market which is one-half block from Main Street on East Sixth Street.

When walking, take notice of the many features placing this community at the end of the 19th and 20th century: different styles of brick homes, fancy porch millwork (sometimes referred to as "gingerbread"), stone homes, turrets in the two and more stories, slate roofs, ornate door and window surrounds. Eight significant buildings will be described and interesting architectural details of others buildings in the district will be mentioned.

Walk one-half block west to Main Street and turn left. All buildings described will be on the opposite side of the street.

1. Corner of Main and Sixth Streets

At this corner once stood the Hillegassville Hotel built prior to 1811. It served patrons until 2004. Also on this lot stood the Red Hill Broom Works, makers of the first mass-produced flat broom. Finally, this was the site of the turn of the century horse auctions. A race track was located about ¼ mile behind the Turkey Hill store. All are discussed in the introductory history of Red Hill.

2. 5th Street

At the end of the street is the former Red Hill Elementary School constructed in 1932. It is now owned by a church with other tenants including the *Hearthstone Town and Country* newspaper, a pre-school and the Community Thrift Shop.



3. 427 Main Street

Built in 1924 this was the second home of the Red Hill Fire Company. Compare the photo, especially the second floor gracefully curved windows, an example of Art Deco (1918-1929) motifs. The windows were replaced in the 1990s. In the late 1960s, a new, larger firehouse was constructed across and a block off Main Street. The Post Office moved here in 1970.



4. 415 Main Street

The first office of the Red Hill Savings and Loan Association, founded in 1910, was in part of this building from 1943-1950. Previously the association conducted business in the Red Hill Band Hall (a second floor room above a wheelwright shop at 326 Main Street now gone), the second floor of Brey's Restaurant and the second Red Hill Firehouse. Red Hill Savings and Loan Association was an important local source of mortgage funds for families moving into the community to work in the growing manufacturing businesses of the town. The financial institution served the community as a stalwart mortgage lender and significant employer until the 1980s when it became a victim of the national savings and loan crisis.

5. 373 Main Street

Constructed c. 1895 by prominent Red Hill builder George Welker, this building reflects very striking characteristics of the Queen Anne Style with its solid brick construction, picturesque front tower and conical slate roof. Also follow the roof line, as it slants from a flat top. This is called "jerkinhead" and is seen in medieval stone buildings. Note also the prominent decorations around the porch, the windows and the doors. Compare this building with its neighbors to see how it is constructed with more elaborate decorations indicating the home of an important resident. This is the first significant building in the National Register District on the tour.

6. 367-369 Main Street

These double houses are typical of the cigar workers' houses built by partners Lucian B. Miller and John P. Kline ca. 1895. Compare these attractive, though relatively unadorned, homes with the next two buildings on the tour. Miller and Kline are credited with building some 30 to 50 workers' houses in Red Hill. A number of other twin homes nearby have been built by these men at this time for workers' houses.

7. 355 Main Street

The second significant building in the National Register District, built ca.1890. Note the patterns over the windows in the massive stone walls and the sharp point of the "gable" (projecting top front window) both characteristics of the Gothic style. Decorative porch trim millwork is common throughout Main Street. The intricate detail on this house is known as "wedding cake" millwork. This is another descriptive term for a specific type of "gingerbread" and is reminiscent of decorations on a wedding cake.

8. 343 Main Street

The third significant building in the National Register District was also built ca. 1890. Compare this Gothic style house with the house at 355 Main Street. Similar features are the use of stone, the front gable, stonework over the windows and the front porch. The porch addition dates to the 1920s thus altering the original appearance of the front of the home.

9. 229 Main Street

This is a c. 1890 brick home with distinctive remodeling work done ca. 1950. This too was built in the Gothic architectural style compare it with 355 and 343 Main Street homes. Note the beautiful "gingerbread" millwork decorating the porch and architecture.

Cross the street and walk north on Main Street. All buildings described will be on the opposite side.

10. 310 Main Street

The former Hillegass-Miller House, built in 1855, is the fourth significant building in the National Register District. This home was built for George and Rebecca Hillegass, descendants of the Hillegasses who founded the community (once known as Hillegassville). Lucian B. Miller purchased the home by 1873 and began his cigar manufacturing here. At one time he added a frame structure to the rear of the house (since removed) to accommodate his growing business. The factory remained at this location until 1897. At that time he and his partner/brother-in-law John P. Kline, moved the operation to the new mill building at 350 Main Street.

11. 350 Main Street

Built in 1897, this is the fifth significant building in the National Register District, the Miller and Kline Cigar Factory. Lucian B. Miller and John P. Kline were the primary industrialists and employers who shaped the late 19th century development of Red Hill. The factory continued manufacturing cigars until the 1920s, when the industry declined and finally ceased. At this time, the Rosenau Brothers, once the largest manufacturer of girls' dresses in the United States, purchased the factory. They began production here, under the brand "Cinderella Frocks". Now the building is used by the Loft Apartments and the Upper Perkiomen Valley Library.



12. 360 Main Street

Following a catastrophic fire in the stable of the horse auction adjacent to the Red Hill Hotel in 1904, Lucian Miller and John Kline helped establish the first fire company. Built in 1905, the first fire house also accommodated a restaurant and two rooms on the second floor for meetings. Used as a fire house until 1924, the building then continued as a restaurant and finally the apartments we see today. Look for remaining traces of the Fire House doors still visible in the front brick façade. Note the structural similarities between 360 Main and 350 Main.



13. 400 Main Street

Beneath this late 20th century façade, this 1897 building was originally Charles Heist's dry goods store. Subsequent tenants included the Perkiomen Post 5954, Veterans of Foreign Wars and then the Red Hill Savings and Loan which updated the façade in the 1960s. Presently, it is home to the Harleysville National Bank, Red Hill Branch.

14. 518 Main Street

Built ca. 1910, this interesting little building is typical of the rural bungalows that once dotted the towns and countryside. Besides a simple home, this building has served as the Red Hill Post Office, among other uses.

15. 598 Main Street

Built in 1847 by Josiah Hillegass, this is the sixth significant structure in the National Register District. It is especially significant for two reasons, its age and its builder, Josiah Hillegass.



Adam and Frederick Hillegass were among the first persons to acquire title to lands in this area. Adam's son George erected the "Hillegassville Hotel" across the street from the site of this house in 1811 (torn down 2004). Following the death of George in 1833, his son Josiah took over the hotel and, in 1847, built this stately brick residence. Now an attorney's office, Hillegass family house remains as the first brick home constructed between Collegeville and Allentown.

16. 616-618 Main Street

The final significant building in the National Register District, these brick twin homes stand out as examples of structures built in the 1890s. The Queen Anne style of construction became popular when America was caught up in the excitement of new technologies. Factory-made, precut architectural parts were shuttled across the country on a rapidly expanding train network. Exuberant builders combined these pieces to create innovative, and sometimes excessive, homes. The style is seen here especially in the decorative window treatments and the variety of textures used on roof and the various sides of the home.

Carefully cross Main Street and turn left on Sixth Street and proceed about 4 blocks.

17. 226 Sixth Street

The Moyer Cigar Factory, built around 1890, is the final significant building in the National Register District. S. C. Moyer operated the second of two large cigar manufacturing businesses in Red Hill from the 1880s to the 1920s. Following the closing of the cigar factory, the Red Hill Rug Company manufactured and shipped rugs throughout the country into the 1950s. Apartments and small businesses are now located in this reminder of Red Hill's industrial past.



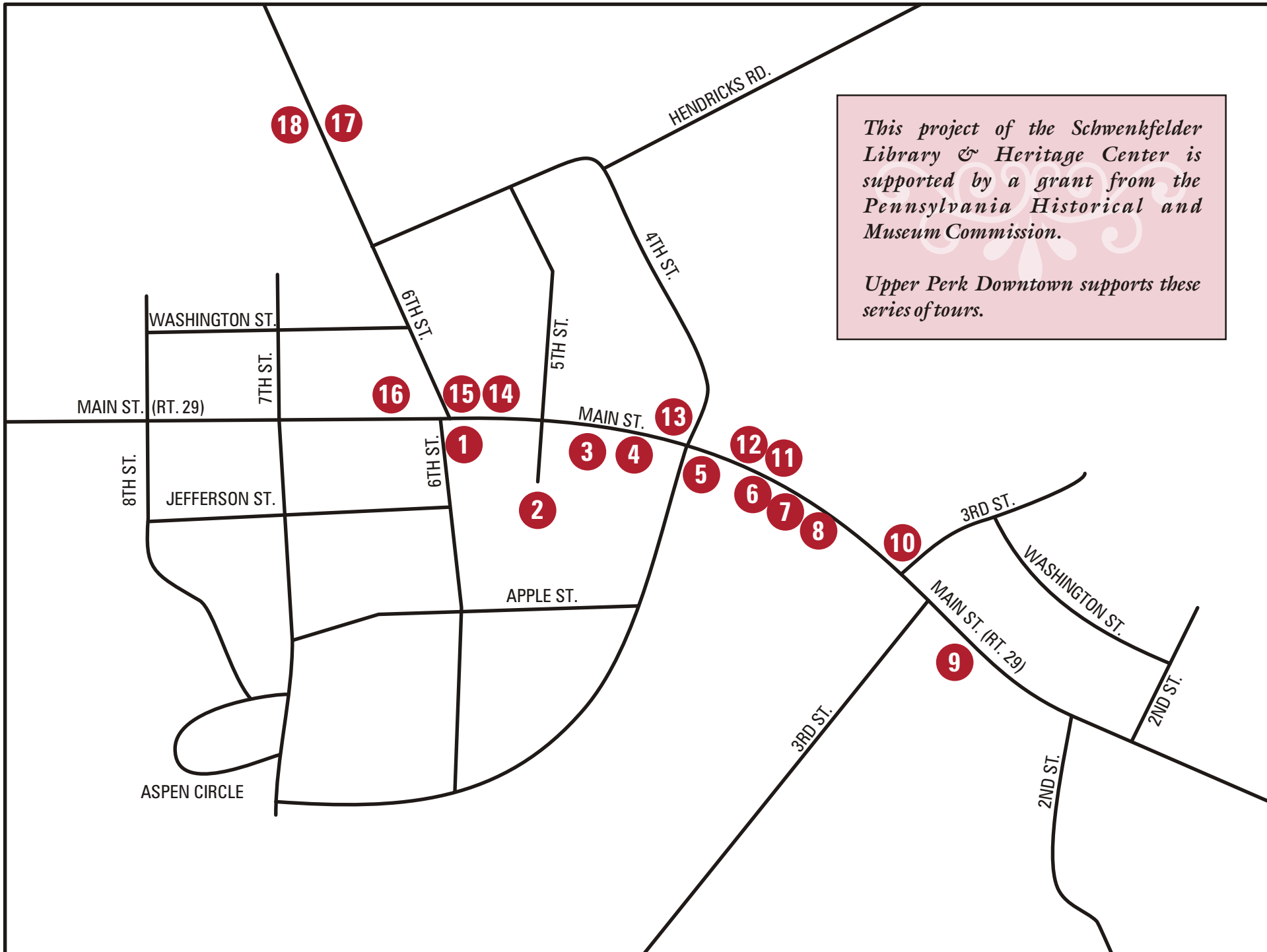
18. On the opposite side of the street is the site of the once busy Red Hill Railroad Station. Rail service to this rural community began at this spot in 1874.

The presence of rail transportation made this community more desirable for residence and industry. The fabric of Red Hill changed with the coming of the railroad and new families settling in the town. With the train came greater access to city culture and the influence of Philadelphia life came to be felt in the once distant rural community. With the railroads came access to markets for manufactured goods and provided industry access to a cheaper, hard working rural labor force interested in the better wages that factory work offered. These are just a few of the important changes to Red Hill, and the Upper Perkiomen Valley, that the railroad set in motion. If you look closely, you may still see a hint of the railroad roadbed.



Turn back and proceed up Sixth Street to Redner's parking lot.

THIS CONCLUDES THE TOUR



This project of the Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center is supported by a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Upper Perk Downtown supports these series of tours.