

# Hellertown

Healthful      Prosperous

Growing

*The Walking Tour of Hellertown  
Past and Present*

PRESENTED TO THE HELLERTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
By NATHAN BRUCE YONNEY

This tour, *The Walking Tour of Hellertown, Past and Present*, is designed to give all those who use it a feeling of what the community of Hellertown is all about.

Hellertown was founded in 1742 by Christopher Heller, for whom the town was named. Christopher Heller was one of the early settlers who immigrated from Germany and Switzerland. These people are now known as Pennsylvania Dutch.

A small group of these immigrants, Heller included, bought large tracts of land from William Penn. Christopher Heller bought fifteen hundred acres. Another immigrant, The Reverend John Phillip Boehm, bought two hundred acres on the Saucon. His son, Anthony, built the Boehm House, which you will see later on the walking tour.

Some of the walking tour takes you down the Main Street in Hellertown or Pennsylvania Route 412. In 1737, it was part of the "King's Highway" and "Walking Purchase." In 1777, the Liberty Bell came through Hellertown on its way to a small church in Allentown, for hiding so as not to fall in the hands of the British during the Revolutionary War.

The earliest inhabitants of the Saucon Valley were the Lenni-Lenape Indians, who were very peaceful in nature. The word "Saucon" or "Sakunk" is an Indian word meaning "a place where a small stream enters a larger one." The Saucon Creek's name originated from this term. You can see the Saucon Creek from the Grist Mill parking lot, where our tour begins.

Feel free to park in the parking areas at the Grist Mill, where our tour begins and ends.

1. THE WAGNER GRIST MILL, 150 West Walnut Street

The Grist Mill did the grinding of many farmers' grist for many years under the management of many different millers. It was built in 1787 by Stophel Wagner and remained in the Wagner Family for all of these years.

2. THE MILLER'S HOUSE, 150 West Walnut Street

This was the structure in which the miller and his family lived. It was built approximately in 1787.

3. THE WASH HOUSE, 150 West Walnut Street

This was the first structure to be built on the land. It was built, like the other structures, by Stophel Wagner. The grist mill, Miller's house, wash house and small pond were leased to the Hellertown Historical Society by the Hellertown Borough for 99 years.

4. THE HESS HOME, 186 Main Street

This was the house of Samuel Hess. He was the father of Jeremiah S. and Milton Hess, two prominent citizens and business men of the borough. The Rev. Samuel Hess was the pastor of Apple's Church. The Hess House was built in 1822.

5. THE FIRST HIGH SCHOOL, 202 Main Street

This was the first high school in Hellertown. It was built in 1896. The first principal was A.J. Reinhard. The first graduating class consisted of three pupils. This building was used as a lumber yard office for many years. It presently houses a seafood shop.

6. THE ORIGINAL FIRE HOUSE, 318 Saucon Street

Dewey Fire Company originally met in the basement of Paul Fritchman's Store and later at Odd Fellow's Hall. Later, they met at this location along with the Police station and Borough Hall. A two-wheeled hose cart was built and a hook and ladder hand-drawn unit secured. In 1898, the Dewey Fire Company was chartered and a chemical truck was purchased. Charles Zimpfer became the first chief engineer of the company. This building was built between 1900 and 1920 at the cost of \$4,000.00. This structure served as the Fire Department headquarters until 1955.

7. THE HELLERTOWN JAIL, Laubach Alley

This was the first jail of Hellertown, built in 1872. In 1981, it was given to the Historical Society by Mrs. Howard Hess.

8. THE TAVERN HOUSE, 605 Main Street

Originally called the Pennsylvania Hotel, it was built by Federick School between the years 1741 and 1780. Throughout the years it was passed on to the Heller Family who changed the name to the Tavern

House. It was later sold to John Rentzheimer who later sold to Thomas R. Laubach. Thomas Laubach changed the name back to the Pennsylvania Hotel. In 1872, the first elections were held here with Thomas R. Laubach being elected as the first Burgess of Hellertown. Presently it is called the "Original Tavern House" and offers a variety of menu items.

9. CARSON'S HARDWARE, 637-643 Main Street

This building used to be a carriage house. A carriage house was where people built the buggies for those "horse and buggy" days. During the years 1901-1920, St. George's Church held meetings in the upper floor of this building.

10. THE SAUCON MANOR, 650 Northampton Street

The certificate of occupancy was issued on August 31, 1979. It was the first federal housing building to be built in Hellertown. The Saucon Manor is a building for the elderly on a fixed income.

11. HELLERTOWN BOROUGH HALL, Main Street & Easton Road

This was first built in 1818 as the home of Dr. Henry Detwiller, the first homeopathic physician in Pennsylvania. The property later was acquired by his son, Dr. William F. Detwiller. Additions were made, and until 1918 this building was known as the Central Hotel. After the hotel business, the property was even used for a time as an A&P Store! In 1939, The Borough purchased the building from the widow of Dr. Henry D. Heller. Dr. Heller was a nephew of Dr. William F. Detwiller.

12. DETWILLER PLAZA, Main Street & Easton Road

Dr. Albert Knecht Detwiller, nephew of Dr. William F. Detwiller, donated this area to the Borough for public use and as a memorial to his distinguished grandfather. Before the construction of the plaza, this site was occupied by two landmarks, a stone building, which served as the post office and an adobe building, which for nearly a half century served as Weisel harness and saddle shop. The fountain, pool and base of the flag pole are constructed with the stone from the razed buildings and from flagstones which served as sidewalks in years past. The submerged lights in the fountain were used in the General Electric Company's display at the 1939 World's Fair in New York.

13. CLOCK TOWER, Main Street & Easton Road

Built in 1987 on Detwiller Plaza, the clock itself, was donated to Dr. William F. Detwiller by the American Savings Bank of New York. Dr. Detwiller later gave the clock to the Borough of Hellertown. Through the effort of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Delfoe and many other concerned volunteers, the Hellertown Plaza Clock Association was formed and today we reap the benefits of all their hard work. While looking at the Clock Tower, take time to listen to the beautiful chimes. This was made possible through the generous contribution of Addie Frey.



# HELLERTOWN



### KEY

- 1 The Wagner Grist Mill, 150 Walnut St.
- 2 The Miller's House, 150 Walnut St.
- 3 The Wash House, 150 Walnut St.
- 4 The Hees House, 186 Main St.
- 5 The First High School, 202 Main St.
- 6 The Original Fire House, 318 Saucun St.
- 7 The Hellertown Jail, Laubach Alley
- 8 The Tavern House, 905 Main St.
- 9 Carson's Hardware, 637-643 Main St.
- 10 Saucun Manor, 650 Northampton St.
- 11 Hellertown Borough Hall, Main St. & Easton Rd.
- 12 DeWittier Plaza, Main St. & Easton Rd.
- 13 Clock Tower, Main St. & Easton Rd.
- 14 Boehm House, 786 Main St.
- 15 The Crossroads Inn, 1443 Main St.
- 16 The Laubach House, 337 East High St.
- 17 The Diehl Farm, 339 East High St.
- 18 Park & Fountain behind Water Authority Building
- 19 The Hellertown Water Authority Building, 501 Durham St.
- 20 The Dewey Fire Company, 502 Durham St.
- 21 The Hellertown Pool, Durham & Depot St.
- 22 Dinnick Park
- 23 The Buchner House, Durham St. & Constitution Ave.
- 24 Lest River Caverns
- 25 Hellertown Area Public Library, 409 Constitution Ave.
- 26 The Union Cemetery of Hellertown, 89 Main St.
- 27 The Veterans Memorial, 89 Main St.
- 28 The Union Cemetery of Hellertown Office, 89 Main St.

14. BOEHM HOUSE, 766 Main Street

In approximately 1747, Anthony Boehm, son of the Rev. John Boehm, built the original log structure on this site. The Betsy Ross Club held ownership of the building for some years. The outer structure of the building has been changed and renovated, however, its interior is still there. Several businesses now occupy this building.

15. THE CROSSROADS INN, 1443 Main Street

This was once called the Saucon Hotel and operated by Owen Koch. Today it is run by the Matey Family and is well known for its delicious pizza throughout the Lehigh Valley.

16. THE LAUBACH HOUSE, 337 East High Street

It was built in the early 1940's, this was part of the Joseph Laubach Farm. Presently owned by Mr. & Mrs. Jamie Bodor.

17. THE DIEHL FARM, 339 East High Street

Built in the early 1940's, this was built and owned by members of the Diehl Family. Later it was sold to Norman Weirbach. In 1962, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Bodor became owners after purchasing it from Mr. & Mrs. Frank Pondelek, who had purchased the property from the Weirbach family.

18. PARK & FOUNTAIN BEHIND THE WATER AUTHORITY BUILDING, 501 Durham Street

This property was the middle of the Rentzheimer Farm. As you stand on this land, try to picture it as it might have looked years ago. Orchards and farm land were every where. The creek, although today it runs in a straight path, used to wind through the area. After being given this property, the Water Authority realized the need for a family recreational area. They graded the area, planted several hundred trees, and erected the fountain.

19. THE WATER AUTHORITY BUILDING, 501 Durham Street

In 1832, Tobias Rentzheimer, son of Dr. William H. Rentzheimer, a practicing physician in Hellertown, built this home. The Borough bought this property that later became the home of the Water Authority. The old smoke house out back served in the preservation of the meats and the baking of foods for a century.

20. THE DEWEY FIRE COMPANY, 502 Durham Street

Built in 1955 at a cost of \$120,000 this modern, well-equipped functional building served the needs of a Borough that was growing fast. Today, through the efforts of a totally volunteer force, the department

continues to serve the community with their well-trained dedication and hard work.

21. THE HELLERTOWN POOL, Durham and Depot Streets North

Built in 1940 with the help of WPA Funds, made available during Franklin Roosevelt's Presidency, and an additional \$168,000, it has in recent years gone through major renovations and improvements.

22. DIMMICK PARK, Durham and Depot Streets South

This beautiful park was named after Morris J. Dimmick (1888-1972). Morris Dimmick, son of Jacob and Elmira Dimmick, was an active member of the community for many years. At Dimmick Park, there are constant activities ranging from football, softball, baseball, sledding and picnicking. It is a true tribute to the man who was instrumental in the history of so many of the programs.

23. THE RENTZHEIMER HOUSE, Durham Street & Constitution Avenue

Built by Carl Rentzheimer in the early 1800's, this house is presently owned by the Silver Creek Country Club. Carl Rentzheimer came to America from Germany in October 1770 having sailed out of Rotterdam and landed in Philadelphia. He settled in Hellertown after several years of military duty in the Revolutionary War.

24. LOST RIVER CAVERNS, Durham Street

In 1883 a cave was discovered on the Rentzheimer Farm. Men who were searching for limestone came upon a small entrance. It was not fully explored until later. Children, years ago, would play cowboys and indians in the cave. This is now the site of Lost River Caverns. People from all over the country come to visit this educational and entertaining sight.

25. HELLERTOWN AREA PUBLIC LIBRARY, 409 Constitution Avenue

Construction for this beautiful building was started in 1992. It is with high hopes that it will be completed in 1993. This library will be able to house many more books and reading materials than the previous building on Main Street. Eventually, it is planned that the Saucon Valley Community Center also be located on this portion of land.

26. THE UNION CEMETERY OF HELLERTOWN, 89 Main Street

Between the years of 1861-1880, the Union Cemetery Association was formed. The first burial was that of Caroline Rentzheimer. Without a formal entrance until 1992, the cemetery now boasts a beautiful gateway to its grounds. It was designed by Richard E. Ackerman who died before it was ever completed. During the opening ceremonies, the entrance was dedicated to Mr. Ackerman, a member of the Board of Directors to the cemetery and grandfather to the author of this book.

27. THE VETERANS MEMORIAL, 89 Main Street

Names that appear on this wall are the men from Hellertown who have fought for the rights of our country.

28. THE UNION CEMETERY OF HELLERTOWN BUILDING,

89 Main Street

January 8, 1927, the Union Cemetery Association of Hellertown bought this land from Milton Ruth. At that time the property consisted of a house, smoke house, barn and an out-house. For approximately seven years this building, previously the home of Milton Ruth, has been used as the office for the Union Cemetery Association.

\*\*The numbers 1084, 4006, 2105, and 2107, on the center page map represent the station numbers of the GPS Survey monument locations. Each monument is a 1 1/2" aluminum cap on a 30" number 5 rebar. This is set flush to the ground. The following information is from data from 1983.

	Latitude	Longitude
Number	1084 is 40 35 35.61652 North and	75 20 20.49784 West
Number	4006 is 40 35 44.13635 North and	75 20 16.63569 West
Number	2105 is 40 35 00.88897 North and	75 20 12.29877 West
Number	2104 is 40 34 29.95004 North and	75 20 15.59781 West

\* The information above was provided by Mr. David Harte, Engineer

Some time between the years 1921 and 1940, the Hellertown Business Association coined the motto . . . .

**Hellertown  
Healthful Prosperous  
Growing**

After many months of researching for this project and interviewing members of this community, I find that this motto still rings true. It is a community of young and old, of sharing and caring, and that is a healthy community. It is a community that is growing with businesses and new families and that is a prosperous community. It is a community that is open for change and always looking ahead to the future and that is a growing community.

There are many people who have helped make this book possible. I would like to mention them: My Family, leaders and scouts from Boy Scout Troop 349, Mr. David Harte, Mr. David Heintzelman, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Bodes, Mr. Albert Hoppes and Members of the Hellertown Historical Society, citizens of the Borough of Hellertown, and the 250th Anniversary Celebration Committee of Hellertown. I am thankful to them all.

I DEDICATE THIS BOOKLET TO  
MY GRANDFATHER  
**RICHARD E. ACKERMAN**  
WHO SHARED WITH ME, HIS LOVE FOR  
LIVING AND HIS LOVE FOR  
HIS COMMUNITY.  
I WILL BE FOREVER GRATEFUL.