

HISTORIC RESOURCES OF IMPORTANCE TO THE TRAIL CORRIDOR

DESIGNATION AS A NATIONAL AND STATE HERITAGE AREA

A National Heritage Area is a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape. The Schuylkill River received this designation from Congress in 2000. The Schuylkill River watershed was designated a Pennsylvania Heritage Area by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in 1995. National & State Heritage Areas work to revitalize and restore the region through natural and cultural resource preservation, education, recreation, community revitalization, and heritage tourism.

HISTORIC TOWN CENTERS ALONG THE TRAIL

The town center of **Leesport**, **Shoemakersville**, and **Hamburg** contain numerous historic structures and streets, and make for important stopping points along the Schuylkill River Trail. Please see more discussion under Section I-D, Benefits of the Trail.

REMAINS OF THE SCHUYLKILL CANAL

Locks

- Herbine's Lock, south of Leesport
- Peacock Lock (private land)
- Kelly's Lock, now a park in Muhlenberg Twp.
- Frick's Lock, now a park in Muhlenberg Twp.

Lock Keeper's Houses

- Leesport Lock House - The house was built in 1834 and restored to 1880-1910 period. It is located on South Wall Street at Lock #36.
- Daubersville Lock House - Now a private home.
- Fire Locks Lock House - Now a private home.
- House in a Lock - Shoemakersville house built into a lock.

In addition, much of the former canal prism is still visible, although overgrown. Also visible are several stone culverts in poor condition.

REMAINS OF THE UNION CANAL

Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail

<http://www.co.berks.pa.us/parks/cwp/view.asp?a=1229&q=448192&parksNav=|>

The Union Canal was 79 1/2 miles in length and ran from Reading on the Schuylkill River to Middletown on the Susquehanna River. The Union Canal's first engineer, William Weston, copied the narrow and shallow construction methods used in building canals in his native England. The canal, completed in 1827 at a cost of over six million dollars, was never an economic success because of the reluctance of boatmen to use the narrow channel and locks. Near the confluence of the Tulpehocken Creek and the Schuylkill River (below Stonecliffe), a

weigh station was built adjacent to lock No. 52 E. to determine the net weight of the cargo transported by the barge liable for a toll charge. The average toll assessed was 1 1/2 to 2 cents per ton per mile (1830).

Stops along the trail include:

- Stonecliffe Recreation Area on land that formerly was Gring's limestone quarry (late 19th to 20th century)
- Kissinger Homestead & Blacksmith Shop (1867)
- Mule Bridge & Lock #51 E
- Fisher Homesteads (1843 and 1861) and Waste Culvert
- Grigg's Mill (1811) and Homestead - The barn (1896) has been converted into a visitor's center while the stone house (1831) serves as the County Parks and Recreation department offices.
- Lock No. 49 E. - one of the 93 stone lift locks on the Union Canal.
- Site of J.B. Winter's Grist Mill
- Berks County Heritage Center
- Lock No. 48 E
- Van Reed Property - This was the location, until 1964, of Van Reed's Covered Bridge, a 144 foot single-spanned covered bridge crossed the Tulpehocken Creek. It was severely damaged in 1959 and removed five years later.
- Lock No. 47 E - In 1976, this lift lock received restoration efforts including stonework realignment and installation of four new yellow pine miter gates.
- Reber's Mill and Bridge - In 1951, the steel highway bridge which spans the creek today replaced Reber's Covered Bridge (1837), which was 129 feet in length. This bridge provided access to Reber's Grist Mill,

REMAINS OF THE READING RAILROAD

The Reading Company Technical & Historical Society (RCT&HS)

<http://www.readingrailroad.org/>

The Reading Company Technical & Historical Society (RCT&HS), was incorporated July 16, 1976 to preserve the rich history of a pioneering railroad. As an all-volunteer, non-profit, educational corporation, the RCT&HS is a repository for knowledge, artifacts, and memorabilia related to keeping alive the memory of one of America's greatest transportation institutions. Now over 25 years old, the Society is composed of about 1000 members in many areas of the USA and even abroad.

As the Society grew it worked to preserve the history of the railroad in many ways, including an archival collection of Reading Company documents, blueprints, rolling stock, equipment and locomotives. Until 1988 its collection was housed at the locomotive shops in Reading, Pa. When the owners of the building wouldn't renew the lease the collection was relocated to Leesport, Pa. along the Blue Mountain & Reading Railroad right-of-way.

Beginning in 2000, the Society began planning for a larger permanent museum site to display its unique collection. Meetings were held with paid consultants and goals were established. A plan has emerged from these sessions to develop a three fold approach. An anchor site would be created at South Hamburg, Pa. using existing former industrial buildings. Two satellite sites would also be developed, one at Temple, PA and the other at Schuylkill Haven, PA. These additional sites would benefit the museum plan by adding additional

storage/display space and provide destinations for possible excursion train operations from South Hamburg.

The noted **Peacock Bridge**, built by the Reading Railroad carried the railroad across the Schuylkill River from Bern Township to Muhlenberg Township. It now carries the tracks of the Reading and Northern, and is in daily use.

REMAINS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

- Shoemakersville Train Station has been beautifully restored, and is now in private ownership.
- Also extant are numerous girder bridges and stone culverts, still in occasional use.

BRIDGES

- Old US Route 22 Bridge, Hamburg
- Five Locks Bridge
- Leesport Bridge
- former location of Stouts Ferry Bridge
- former Leisch's Bridge, two piers remain, should be rebuilt to cross the Schuylkill as a bridge for non-motorized use.
- Schuylkill Avenue Bridge, Reading
- Buttonwood Street Bridge, Reading

LAKE ONTELAUNEE

<http://www.berkscountyweb.com/LakeOntelaunee.htm>

Lake Ontelaunee is a 1,082 acre lake owned by the City of Reading. The Lake is located in Berks County along State Route 73 approximately 8 miles north of the center of the City of Reading. The Lake was developed in 1926 to extend and improve the water supply of the City of Reading by damming Maiden Creek. Since that time the Lake has become a favorite hunting and fishing location. No boats are allowed on this Lake, all fishing is from the lake shore, and it is a day use only facility, no overnight camping allowed.. There are many access points to the water and several excellent trails around the Lake. Most warm water fish are plentiful in Lake Ontelaunee. In the fall and spring the Lake becomes a favorite resting place for waterfowl and songbirds migrating along the North Atlantic Flyway. In the winter this is one of the hot spots for ice fishing. Picnic areas and rest rooms facilities are available at several locations around the Lake. Its bridges, spillway, and control structures are of historical architectural and engineering interest.

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

To be enjoyed is a 300-year old landscape with associated residences, barns and outbuildings of local materials, including sandstone and limestone

BERKS COUNTY HERITAGE CENTER

<http://www.berksmuseums.org/heritage/>

<http://www.co.berks.pa.us/parks>

The Berks County Heritage Center is a historical interpretive complex commemorating important eras of the county's cultural history. The Heritage Center is located on Red Bridge Road off Route 183 one mile north of the Reading Regional Airport and a quarter-mile south of the intersection of Route 183 and new Route 222. It may also be accessed via the Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail.

It is open from May 1 through the last Sunday in October. The hours are Tuesday - Saturday, 10-4, and Sunday 12-5 as well as summer holidays. Tours are available daily; the last tour leaves one hour before closing. The Heritage Center's main event, the annual Heritage Festival, is held the first full weekend in October.

The Heritage Center includes:

The Reeser Farm House & Herb and Salad Garden

This well-built vernacular stone farm house serves as an information center, as well as the offices for the Heritage Center Interpretive Services, Recreation, and Park Rangers staffs. The house was built by Abraham Reeser after he bought the land in 1774. The 55-acre farm was owned and operated by various families until being sold to the county in 1978. The Herb and Salad Garden shows a typical part of farm life brought to America by the Europeans. Only herbs and vegetables grown in the early 1800's are planted here

The Gruber Wagon Works

The Gruber Wagon Works survives as one of the most complete examples of an integrated rural manufactory of its kind in the nation. Erected in 1882 by Franklin H. Gruber, the wagon works evolved from a single craftsman shop, having a variety of specialized hand tools, into a family-operated business which employed up to 20 men who utilized mass-production methods. Unlike a modern assembly process, wagon parts were transported back and forth between various rooms in order to complete a segment of the work.

Wagon wheels were constructed in the bench shop, and wooden parts of the wagon were made from patterns in the wood shop. Wheels were "tired" and wagons were "ironed" and assembled in the blacksmith shop. The distinctive striping and scrollwork were applied by hand in the paint shop.

During the winter of 1976-77, the Gruber Wagon Works was moved by the Army Corps of Engineers from its original location near Mt. Pleasant. Plans called for the creation of Blue Marsh Lake to reduce flooding downstream along the Tulpehocken Creek and the Schuylkill River. Its construction required the flooding of low-lying areas along the Tulpehocken, including the original sites of the Gruber Wagon Works and Deppen Cemetery.

Tulpehocken means "land of the turtle" in the language of the Lenni Lenape, the Native Americans who lived in this region before its settlement by Europeans. The turtle holds a special place in Lenape beliefs, as they believed that the land of the world was on the back of a giant turtle. Attesting to its name, turtles can often be found along the edges of the Tulpehocken Creek and in the remains of the Union Canal.

In 1978, the wagon works was designated as a National Historical Landmark by the United States Government, commemorating its historic significance as an industry from a bygone era of American craftsman.

Howard Hiester Canal Center

Through an extensive inventory including artifacts from the Schuylkill Navigation Company and the Hiester Boatyard, the C. Howard Hiester Canal Center presents a coherent story of canal transportation. It displays this country's early growth and specifically the important contribution the canal system made to the history of Berks County.

Canals saw their rise and fall in the 19th century. They offered means of bulk transportation and travel in the era prior to railroads when the only alternative to walking was the horse and wagon.

Mr. Hiester gathered as many artifacts and representative items as possible from that section of the Schuylkill Canal between Reading and Philadelphia. He accumulated a wealth of memorabilia that might otherwise have been lost. This included the houseboat "Mildred," which plied the Schuylkill Canal between Reading and Philadelphia, a toll collection booth, and a pilot house from the tugboat "Dolphin."

The end result was that Mr. Hiester had acquired the largest private collection of 19th century canal memorabilia in America. Through the efforts of one man, we have the opportunity to view the most extensive private collection of a former era.

Wertz's (Red) Bridge

Wertz's Covered Bridge, also known as the Red Bridge, is the longest single-span bridge remaining in Pennsylvania. It was erected in 1867 using the Burr Arch-Truss construction design. In 1979, the bridge was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. It stretches 204 feet across the Tulpehocken Creek, connecting Bern and Spring Townships. Although no longer in use for regular traffic, it is capable of being used and is available for emergency vehicles

Melcher's Grist Mill

Melcher's Grist Mill, moved to the Heritage Center from Bally, PA was built in 1888. A water-powered mill, it was designed to be used only by the inhabitants of the farm on which it was, which was unusual.

Deppen Cemetery

Originally located south of Route 183, near Mt. Pleasant, the Deppen Cemetery began as a family burial ground. Known locally as "the Catholic Cemetery", the first known burial was in 1808, while the last was in 1905.

Prior to the construction of Blue Marsh Lake an extensive search was conducted. Sixty-eight graves were found at the original site; but only 36 of these were identifiable. Some of the unidentified bodies are believed to be the 20 to 30 Irish laborers who died of "swamp" or "canal" fever during the building of the Union Canal.

The descendants of the people buried there were offered the chance to have these remains moved to the Heritage Center ground. They agreed and in the summer of 1978, the Army Corps of Engineers unearthed the bodies and reinterred them in the field near the Gruber Wagon Works. The bodies were placed in the same relative positions that they had been before and the new burial ground was consecrated.

The Distlefink (outdoor sculpture)

The Distlefink is an example of Pennsylvania Dutch art. When the early German immigrants arrived at their new homes in Pennsylvania, they identified the small field finch found here with a similar European bird call the Distlefink, which translates to *thistle finch*.

Folk art that grew out of that period used motifs common to the everyday lives of the “artists”. Flowers, fruit, animals, and birds were used to decorate all manner of furniture, tools, and records kept on paper within the German community. The Distlefink, a happy, bright bird was a popular choice, and came to represent happiness and good luck.

As the folk art movement spread to other communities, the Distlefink was represented in different proportions and colorations; this design and color has been researched as authentic of the early versions.