

# Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours – Troy Hill

## Heroes and History on a Hill

“Geography and tradition, key elements in the growth of any community, contributed significantly to the unique development of Troy Hill. Long before 1877, when the Pennsylvania legislature approved the annexation of Troy Hill into Allegheny City, hundreds of German-speaking families trekked up the wagon roads and footpaths to establish their homes on the plateau overlooking the town of Allegheny, the Allegheny River, and across the river, Pittsburgh. On this relatively flat hilltop there emerged a village reminiscent of the old world: a heimat or homeland, in Allegheny.”

Thus begins the story of Troy Hill as recorded on the history page of the Troy Hill Citizens website. The authors go on to describe Pennsylvania’s designation of 3,000 acres atop the plateau as a “reserve tract” in 1783, one of several similarly designated areas in the state. The Commonwealth sold portions of the land to raise funds to pay the troops who had served Pennsylvania in the Revolutionary War. Present day Troy Hill was first acquired by Captain George Wallace, who, in 1788, was appointed by Benjamin Franklin as the first Common Pleas Court Judge in the newly formed Allegheny County. (The information in this paragraph is gleaned from the Troy Hill Citizens website and is attributed to a booklet written and produced by John and Ann Canning.)

During your tour of this vibrant community, whose pride is celebrated by no fewer than four large welcoming signs and building paintings, you will experience some of its rich history as you trek up and down Troy Hill’s Twentieth Century footpaths: Pittsburgh city steps from the 1940s and 1950s. Learn more about Troy Hill here <http://troyhillpittsburgh.com/troy-hill-history/> and here. <https://www.pittsburghbeautiful.com/2020/03/04/pittsburgh-neighborhoods-troy-hill/>

This tour includes 11 sets of staircases, with a total of 1,022 steps.

This walk is 5 miles long and takes about two and a half hours.

This tour is current as of May 2023. The accompanying map shows the locations of the staircases you will explore on this tour.

I recommend starting this tour at the front door of the old Eberhardt and Ober Brewing Company, at the corner of Troy Hill Road and Vinial Street. The inscription over the front door of this impressive three-story brick building, now occupied by an engineering company, announces that the brewery was established in 1852 and



Eberhardt and Ober Brewery

that this structure was built in 1901. The history section of the Troy Hill Citizens website describes the active civic involvement of John Ober and William Eberhardt – and contributions beyond providing the gift of beer to their fellow citizens.

As “I’ll have an Eberhardt and Ober” doesn’t easily roll off the tongue while bellying up to a bar, the brew, one of Pittsburgh’s most popular around 1900, became known simply as E & O. Thus, “I’ll have an E & O.” Much easier. And it prompted a catchy company jingle, suggesting customers drink E & O “early and often.”

Eberhardt and Ober merged with the Pittsburgh Brewing Company in 1899. The part of the combined operation you are standing in front of was closed in 1952 during a brewery workers strike, which also impacted the Fort Pitt and Duquesne breweries. But local beer lovers cheered three decades later in 1986 when the Pennsylvania Brewing Company, in a nod to long-ago German immigrants of Troy Hill, opened operations and began brewing German-tradition beers at the site of the old brewery, next door to the 1901 building. They still serve fine beers and excellent food in their tastefully renovated brewpub. But despite the historical, and some might say sage, advice of having fine beer early and often, I suggest waiting until *after* the rigorous five-mile walk awaiting you!

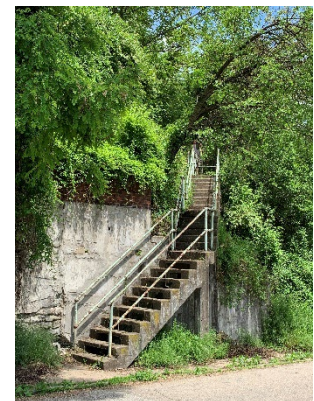


**Vinial Street Steps**

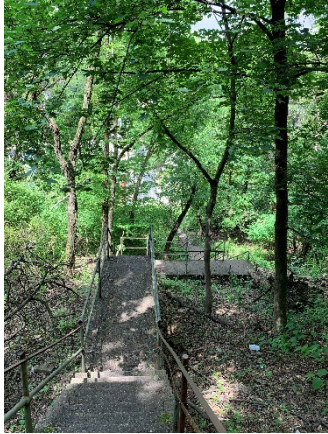
Begin your tour through Troy Hill by heading north on Vinial Street. Soon after passing Penn Brewery you will notice, on your left, another component of the former brewing operations: a grand brick building known simply as the Bottling Department. When you reach Wettach Street on the left, look right to discover a staircase that serves as your initial trek to the top of the Troy Hill plateau. This steeply challenging set of 177 steps, constructed in 1947, climbs through dense woods, then bears right and levels off between some houses, and eventually connects with Province Street. Turning right on Province Street, you’ll be afforded a stunning view of our beloved Pittsburgh skyline.

Continue along Province Street as it bears left and runs downhill. You’ll pass houses on your left, perched on the hill above you. One proud homeowner has adorned the wall holding the hillside in place with paintings depicting the area’s hills and rivers, along with tiered flower beds. Soon you will discover the high-rise Basin Street Steps leading up the hill to the left. These 93 steps, built in 1950, first climb gently through woods and then run between houses as they bear left and climb to Goettman Street. Along the way you will enjoy fine vistas of the Allegheny River and the hills beyond to your right.

Basin Street continues as a “real” street for a block until it becomes another stairway at its intersection with Brabec Street. These 188



**Beginning of Basin Street Steps**



**Basin Street Steps from Brabec to Voskamp**

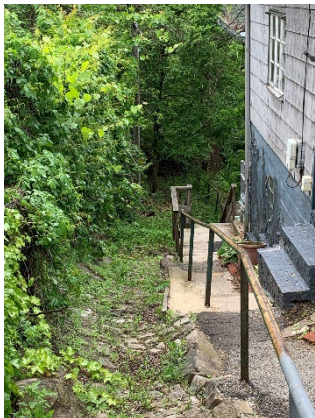
steps, also constructed in 1950, descend a wooded hillside to Voskamp Street. The boundary between Troy Hill and Spring Garden runs along this hillside. Don't worry. I won't have you lingering in Spring Garden for long. But it's a neighborhood you can look forward to visiting on a subsequent steps tour.

Now turn right on Voskamp Street. As you walk the two blocks before reaching your next staircase, you might be curious about a pleasant aroma in the air. It emanates from Threadbare Cider House and Meadery, where you can relax and enjoy some refreshments at the end of the Spring Garden Steps Tour. For now, keep Penn Brewery in mind. But learn more about Threadbare here.

<https://threadbarecider.com/>

Near the end of Voskamp Street you'll find another staircase that leads back up to Troy Hill. These 162 steps, also traveling through dense woods, end at Lowrie Street, where you will turn left. Take your first left onto Adair Street. This short, one-block long street becomes Herman Street when it turns right. To the left you'll find the Herman Street steps.

This short, narrow staircase of 17 steps descends very closely to a



**Herman Street Steps**

few houses and then continues as a path through thick woods before petering out. Pittsburgh's public stairways often serve as streets, running close to the front or rear doors of people's homes. The Herman Street steps are as close to people's front doors as I have seen, almost within arm's reach. I admit to being hesitant to walk that close to someone's door. Having documented for you where the steps lead – or in this case, don't lead – I might suggest you enjoy them from the top and experientially claim them via the accompanying photograph.



**Steps from Voskamp to Lowrie**

As I was walking up these steps, I met an elderly woman who was just starting down the stairway, struggling a bit, cane in hand.

“May I help you, Ma’am?”

“No, thank you,” she replied. And then, with a twinkle in her eye, she said, “I just look like I need help. But thank you, nonetheless. Let me step aside so you can get past.”

After I stepped by her, I remarked that it was a fine day to be out for a walk. She agreed, and went on to say:

“But I haven’t seen too many people out walking today. You are only the third person I’ve seen. Are you from around here?”

“No, I live in the South Hills,” I responded. “But I have visited Troy Hill a few times. I like it a lot over here.”

“Yes,” she said. “It’s nice here. It’s quiet, and the people are friendly.”

I hear that often when I converse with people in their neighborhoods on the hills: “It’s quiet here.” People seem to value that. It harks back to earlier times when their houses on the hills were places of respite from the mills and factories down along the rivers where they worked. And steps were their paths to peace and quiet.

This pleasant lady went on to tell me that she tries to get out for a walk every day.

“I walk over to the park. They have benches there where I can sit.”

I told her I thought that was a wonderful idea, continuing:

“Here is my philosophy about walking: if you walk each day, then you should be able to walk the next day, which means you can walk forever, as long as you don’t stop.”

“I like that,” she responded, gleefully.

I went on to say that I planned to live to 100, and that walking was part of the plan.

“I’ll be 100 in August,” she replied.

“Oh my! You’re my hero!”



“I don’t know about that,” she said. “But I do like to walk.”

I bid her goodbye and went on my way, cheered, even fortified, by our conversation.

Continue along the “real” Herman Street until you reach Gardner Street, where you turn left. Then turn right on Hatteras Street and follow it until you come to Purse Way, a stairway that descends to your left. While strolling along Hatteras Street you’ll see, on your left, a small war memorial, a common sight on these steps tours. This one was erected by American Legion Post 565.



Purse Way

Purse Way is easy to find as it has its own street sign and brightly painted, yellow railings. The 48 steps, constructed in 1949, give way to a grassy path behind some houses and ends at a steps junction with the 134 Harpster Street steps, 79 leading down to the left and 55 leading up to the right. The Harpster Street steps were also built in 1949.

Take a left turn at the junction and descend the Harpster Street steps to Lager Street. You’ll encounter an “orphan” house on the left as you go down the steps. “Orphans” are houses accessible only by steps. As Bob Regan notes in his book, Pittsburgh Steps, “These

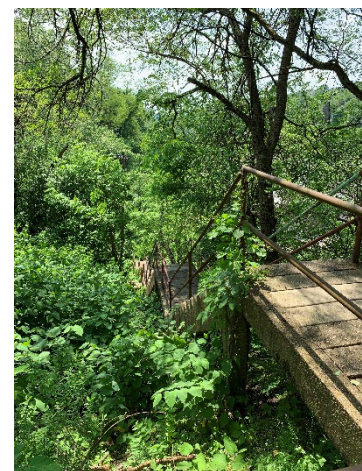
houses have mailboxes on the steps and also have steps themselves from the city steps to the house. There is no other access to the houses except via the steps. The thoughts that occur to a visitor are *Where do they park? What about groceries? What about moving?*”

Walk back up the Harpster Street steps past Purse Way until you reach the “real” Harpster Street, at its intersection with Claim Street, at the top of the hill. To your right you’ll see Most Holy Name of Jesus Church, built in 1866 as part of an expansion of



Holy Name Parish Rectory

Catholic parishes in the Pittsburgh area to serve a growing number of German Catholic families. Learn more about the parish’s history here. <http://troyhillpittsburgh.com/troy-hill-history/>



Harpster Street Steps

Farther along Harpster Street you’ll find the stunning Second Empire architectural style rectory for Holy Name Parish. Dating to 1875-1877, it was the residence of the parish’s first pastor, Fr. Suitbert G. Mollinger. Next to the rectory is St. Anthony’s Chapel. St. Anthony’s grew out of Fr. Mollinger’s intense

interest in sacred relics. Today the chapel is said to house the largest collection of sacred relics outside the Vatican in Rome. The chapel has been open whenever I have visited Troy Hill. One always feels welcome to join and listen in on one of the frequent tours. Very striking are the life-size Stations of the Cross, carved from wood and imported from Europe. In addition to information included on the history page of the Troy Hill Citizens website, you can learn more about the chapel here. <https://saintanthonychapel.org/the-chapel>

After visiting the chapel, head south on Tinsbury Street. On your way you'll pass yet another impressive church, Grace Lutheran Church. Organized as the Grace Mission in 1893, the congregation constructed this edifice in 1899. Church members decided to install a pipe organ in 1906, with none other than Andrew Carnegie paying half the cost. Learn more about Grace Lutheran here. <http://troyhillpittsburgh.com/troy-hill-history/>

Turn left when you reach Lowrie Street. In one block you'll come to what I think of as Troy Hill's town square, although it actually takes on more of the shape of a triangle. A pedestrian island sits in the middle of the confluence of Lowrie, Ley, and Froman Streets. The island is home to a World War I memorial, erected by the Troy Hill Draftees' Association, containing almost 300 names of "those who went from Troy Hill to serve our country in the World War, 1917-1919." Some of the names are marked with stars, indicating, I suspect, that these men gave "their last full measure."



Troy Hill "Town Square"

Standing on the island you can look in one direction and see two large paintings adorning the sides of buildings, celebrating the welcoming nature of Troy Hill. In another direction you'll discover the home of Engine Co. No. 11, A.D. 1901. It's the oldest fire station in Pittsburgh. Learn more about the engine company here. <http://troyhillpittsburgh.com/troy-hill-history/> Opposite the fire station you'll find the upper station house for the Troy Hill Incline, which operated from 1887 to 1898. You could ride it all day for five cents. Perhaps worth it for the Pennsylvania Railroad workers who had to trek up to the plateau at the end of a long day in the railroad shops. Learn more about Pittsburgh's inclines here.

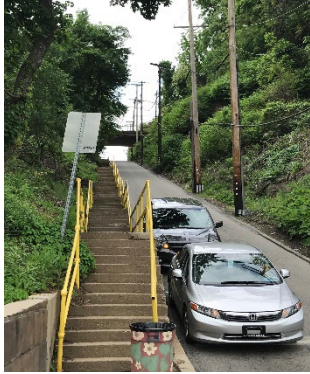


Troy Hill Incline Mural

<http://www.brooklineconnection.com/history/Facts/Inclines.html>

Continue along Lowrie Street and, after crossing a bridge over Rialto Street, descend the 20 Lowrie Street Steps to Rialto Street.

Across Rialto Street you'll see a wall mural celebrating the Troy Hill Incline. The ornate lettering speaks to bygone days when Pittsburgh had 23 inclines. Cross Rialto Street and turn left to descend the 167 Rialto Street steps, originally built in 1950. In 2022, the steps were rehabilitated as part of the reconstruction of the Lowrie Street Bridge. I will admit to not counting the new steps, so there may be



Rialto Street Steps

more or less than 167. As you climb back up the steps – yes, I am encouraging you do that – you will wonder how Rialto Street is only the *fifth* steepest street in Pittsburgh. And you will probably be amused watching cars slowly squeeze by each other, mirrors tucked in, on this devilishly steep and narrow street.

When you reach the top of Rialto Street, perhaps wishing the incline still operated, climb back up the Lowrie Street steps and turn left. You will soon find yourself walking past the Voegtly Evangelical Cemetery. The ornamentation on one headstone caught my eye as I was walking past, even though it was quite some distance from the street. When I detoured to investigate, I found this poignantly

detailed inscription.

IN MEMORY OF REV. G. J. KREDEL. DIED IN R. R. COLLISION NEAR ALTOONA, PA. SEPT. 21, 1864.

AND OF HIS SON OSCAR F. KREDEL. WHO LOST HIS LIFE AT THE SAME TIME.

The inscription goes on to note that Rev. Kredel was the pastor “here” from 1856 to 1864. “Here” refers to the First German Evangelical Protestant Church, or Voegtly Church, founded in 1833 at the foot of Troy Hill Road.

More recently, in 2003, the remains of 727 people were reinterred from the congregation’s long forgotten original cemetery, which was discovered in 1987 during the highway construction linking I-279 and Route 28. Learn more about this fascinating story here.

<http://www.usgwarchives.net/pa/alleghey/tsphotos/voegtly-pittsburgh.htm>

The cemetery is also home to the Western Pennsylvania Firefighters Memorial, which is easy to find as it sits close to the sidewalk. Not far beyond the memorial lies the remains of those moved from the original cemetery.



Heckelman Street Steps

Turn right when you reach Heckelman Street and walk to its end, where you will be able to descend just the first six steps of what had been a long and elaborate stairway leading down to East Ohio Street. Very little of the steps beyond are visible. I have tried, on occasion and unsuccessfully while driving south on Route 28, to catch a glimpse of the stairway through the now dense foliage on the hillside.

Take the six steps back up to Eggers Street and turn right. At the end of Eggers Street you will find the Lookout Street Parklet and a community garden, a vestige of Mayor Luke Ravenstahl’s Edible Gardens program that was initiated in 2013.



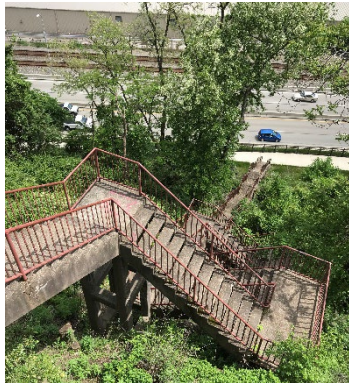


**Lautner Street Steps**

Turn left on Croft Street and then right on Lautner Street to climb the 10 Lautner Street steps. Return to Croft Street, turn right, and then left on Lowrie Street to begin your trek back to Penn Brewery. But don't start licking your lips for that post-walk beer just yet; there's a lot left to discover before you get there.

Five blocks after passing Troy Hill's "town triangle" you reach Troy Hill Road. Approaching the intersection, you'll find on your right an old two-story brick building that, at some point, housed E & C Price Beer Distributor. I wonder if E & C had been around to sell E & O? On your left you'll pass houses with attractive ornate roofs. And as you turn left onto Troy Hill Road, take note of the old house that is now home to Hughes Funeral Home. Built in 1877, it is the Ober-Guehl House, former home of John P. Ober, E & O's president.

As Troy Hill Road turns right you'll see yet another mural welcoming one and all to Troy Hill. Continue along Troy Hill Road as it starts to go downhill. Soon after Goettman Street bears off to the right, you'll find the last stairway on this tour, which descends to the left down to Route 28. These 188 steps, constructed in 1950, are my favorite city steps. Why? I'm charmed by the combination of their steepness, their elaborate switchbacks, and the stunning views up, down, and across the Allegheny River. But sadly, these steps were closed recently, due no doubt to safety concerns related to their condition.



**Troy Hill Road to Route 28**

Unable to descend this magnificent staircase, continue along Troy Hill Road as it descends to Penn Brewery. But hold off on the refreshments; you still have some exploring to do.

I encourage you to cross Troy Hill Road at its intersection with Vinial Street and follow the expansive walkway developed as part of rebuilding East Ohio Street into an expressway. The walkway runs to your left, upriver. As you walk beside a busy highway, you might wonder: What was down here back in the day? Where were people going when they took the Troy Hill Incline or walked down the stairways? We're provided answers through murals and plaques painted and placed in

the wall along the walkway. The Josip Marohnic Bookstore, operating 1898-1914. Thomas Carlin's Sons Foundry, operating 1892-1916. The Allegheny Institute and Mission Church, built in 1849. One of the last things you'll encounter before reaching the closed but still magnificent staircase, are the structural remains of St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Croatian Church. Established in 1894, it was the first Croatian Catholic parish in the country.



**Mural Along East Ohio Street (Route 28)**





"Welcome to Troy Hill, Mr. Heinz!"

Now turn around and return to the intersection of Troy Hill Road and Vinial Street. Looking to your left, you're reminded that Troy Hill is also home to H. J. Heinz. Mr. Heinz began selling horseradish, pickles, vinegar, and other products in 1869, all produced in his first plant in Sharpsburg. Heinz became a Troy Hill neighbor in 1890 when he began construction of the factory complex that churns out the world's best ketchup to this day. Was ketchup one of 57 tasty items Heinz produced at the time? With a dash of modesty, H. J. coined the phrase "57 Varieties" in 1896 when the company actually produced over 60 products. He considered 57 a lucky number and "57 Varieties" a catchy marketing slogan. He was certainly right about the latter. Learn more about this iconic company's history here. <https://www.heinz.com/Heinz-Timeline>

You've absorbed a lot of history and expended a lot of calories during this trek through Troy Hill. Time to reward yourself with some refreshments while you contemplate all you've seen and learned in just two and a half hours. Stop by Penn Brewery and enjoy some German style beer and douse your fries with some Heinz ketchup. No out-of-town condiment for Pittsburgh stepwalkers.

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