

# Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours – Arlington

## The Way We Were

Arlington sits atop the eastern end of the spine that rises above the Monongahela River and runs west to Mount Washington and Duquesne Heights. Arlington Avenue, apparently at one time the heart of Arlington and simply called The Avenue, runs along the spine. For much of this tour you will be walking up and down the steep sides of the ridge between Arlington Avenue and Spring Street, affording you a good workout.

You can learn more about Arlington here.

<https://www.pittsburghbeautiful.com/2020/01/27/arlington/>

And near the end of this tour, you will discover a poignant reminder of the way things were in Arlington “in the day.”

This tour includes 14 staircases, with a total of 432 steps. The walk is about 2.1 miles long and takes about one hour.

This tour is current as of November 2023.

I recommend starting your walk near the intersection of Spring Street and Syrian Street. I found convenient street parking on Spring Street just east of Syrian Street.



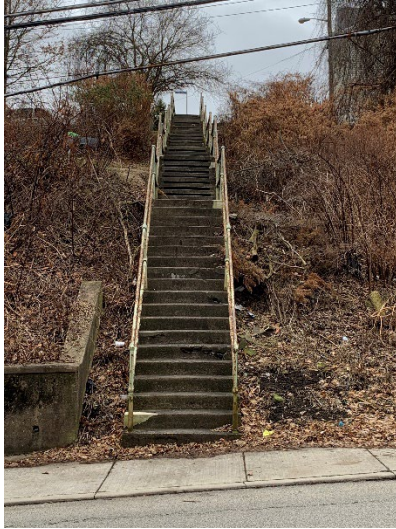
**Dengler Street Steps**

Start by heading west on Spring Street. On your left you will soon notice a brown garage with a sign identifying it as the Dragon Fire He-Man Woman Haters Club and Fire Roasted Grille. Not thinking of myself as either a he-man or a woman hater, I wasn't tempted to stop and inquire whether this garage is ever open as a grille.

Turn right on Dengler Street. At the crest of the hill and on your left you will find the Dengler Street steps, which start out as an elevated sidewalk with an ornate railing. The 14 steps at the end of the sidewalk descend back down to Dengler Street as it descends to meet Arlington Avenue.

Now turn left on Arlington Avenue and you will soon find the Rinne Street steps that climb back up the hill on your left.

These 62 steps were built in 1950 and lead to Una Way. Turn right on Una Way and walk one block, where you will find the Will Way steps, which will lead you back down to Arlington Avenue. These 59 steps were also built in 1950.



**Rinne Street Steps**

Turn left on Arlington Avenue. It was January when I first took this tour, so the leaves were off the trees. I could see, across the valley to the right, the impressive steps bordering both sides of Cologne Street, located in South Side Slopes. While a passably warm day in January might not be as pleasant for walking as a delightfully warm day in June, the lack of leaves certainly opens up views we might not otherwise be able to enjoy. Turn left when you reach Filter Street and climb the 14 Filter Street steps. Turn right when you reach Charcot Street and then take a left at Clover Street. Descend the two sets of “steps” on the right-hand side of Clover Street until you reach Spring Street. Hold tight to the railings as these are steps in name only! While rare, this is not the only Pittsburgh city steps “stairway” that is merely a sidewalk with a railing. You can find another example on Eleanor Street in South Side Slopes.

Turn right on Spring Street and then right again when you reach Eleanor Street. Climb the two sets of Eleanor Street steps, first the 17 steps on the right and then the 28 steps on the left. You will pass the St. Clair AA (Athletic Association) Senior Hall on your right. St. Clair is the Pittsburgh neighborhood south of Arlington. Originally named Lower St. Clair Township, it was annexed to Pittsburgh in 1920. Learn more about St. Clair here.  
<https://www.pittsburghbeautiful.com/2020/02/22/st-clair/>



**Sterling Street Steps**

St. Clair was also the name of the district that sat high above the South Side Slopes next to Arlington on the north. We’ll hear more about that St. Clair later.

After climbing the Eleanor Street steps turn left on Arlington Avenue. As you walk along Arlington Avenue you will see buildings that speak to a grander, more architecturally ornate time when Arlington Avenue bustled with commerce.

Turn left on Sterling Street and descend two sets of steps, the first with 38 and the second with 26. Both stairways were built in 1948.

Turn right on Spring Street. You will soon pass on your left a boarded-up building that proudly proclaims, as painted on the



**Spring Lane Hotel**

brickwork, that it was the “Spring Lane Hotel, Wm. Deckenbach, PROP.” Unable to find any reference to the hotel on the internet, I can only presume that Mr. Deckenbach wasn’t near the hotelier as the Marriott brothers.

After Spring Street bends right, you will find Waite Street leading to your left. Head up Waite Street, where near its end you will find a short stretch of new sidewalk that replaced three steps that used to run between Weber Way and Rahe Street. On my walk I saw two whitetail



**Steps from Waite Street to Arlington Avenue**

bucks in someone’s backyard. I know we have grown accustomed to deer in Pittsburgh, but two big side-by-side bucks stopped me in my tracks.

After observing where the Waite Street steps used to be, turn around and take another set of steps that leads to your left. These 53 steps begin as a path with a railing before steeply descending to Arlington Avenue. You will be rewarded with a fine view of our beloved Pittsburgh skyline.

Turn right on Arlington Avenue. You will soon see on your left a fire station – Arlington Fire Station Engine 22. This crazily-angled modern building is a stark contrast from traditional, brick fire stations you occasionally encounter on these walking tours. Later in this tour you will have the opportunity to see its predecessor.

When you reach the intersection of Arlington Avenue and Spring Street, you will come upon four steps on the southeast corner. Climb these steps before continuing your journey along Arlington Avenue. On your way, and to your left, you will pass three sets of steps in the South Side Slopes neighborhood. Save them for another day. But do enjoy the century-old buildings that speak to The Avenue’s former commercial prominence.

After passing Eleanor Street you will come to a vacant lot on the left-hand side of Arlington Avenue. From the lot you have a fine view of the Cathedral of Learning. As I have mentioned in other tours, it is always fun to see different views and perspectives of the Cathedral and Pittsburgh’s skyline. But here, the near view is equally rewarding. Turn around and look up at the brick walls of the buildings you have just passed. You will find lovely wall paintings celebrating Arlington and The Avenue “in the day.”



**Arlington Memories**

They depict The Avenue in 1944 and the last of the trolleys – the Route 48 – in 1968, as well as other scenes. Fond remembrances of days gone by.

The Route 48 Arlington trolley was replaced by an extension of a bus route, the 54A Arlington Heights. Learn more about the history of Pittsburgh's trolleys here.

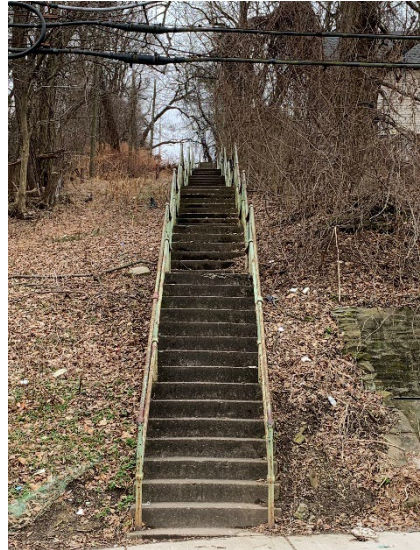
<http://www.brooklineconnection.com/history/Facts/PghTrolley.html#history>

Continue down Arlington Avenue until you reach Syrian Street on the right. Ascend the two sets of Syrian Street steps. The first has 103 steps and the second has 14. Both staircases were built in 1949. On the day I took this walk I saw several wild turkeys in the woods on the left. Like the deer at the other end of Arlington I saw, wild turkeys are also common in Pittsburgh.

You have now completed the Arlington walking tour.

Except for two things.

First, I encourage you to have a fine cup of coffee and some baked goods at Hilltop Coffee, located at 2400 Arlington Avenue and owned and operated by two neighborhood residents. The Avenue may no longer bustle, but this comfortable neighborhood coffee shop serves as a good meeting place for Arlington residents. And the friendly owners will be delighted to talk with you about Arlington's history.



Syrian Street Steps

Second, I ask you to recall two of the wall paintings you saw earlier – those depicting former schools that served Arlington – the Spring Lane School and the Bane School. Neither are standing any longer.

I found the site of the Spring Lane School on a lot on Clover Street now occupied by two newer homes. The Bane School, I learned, once stood at the intersection of Fernleaf Street and Eccles Street, likely on the site of present-day Arlington Playground, technically in South Side Slopes. The school operated from 1895 to 1959 and was named for James K. Bane, the supervising principal for the Bane and Brashear Schools located in the old St. Clair District.

On my quest for the Bane School, I happened upon the building that once housed Arlington Fire Station Engine 22, at the corner of Fernleaf and Eccles Streets. Dating to 1894, it is beautifully restored as a home. This part of South Side Slopes was known as St. Clair District in earlier times. From 1886 to 1935 the St. Clair Incline served the neighborhood, running from the intersection of South Twenty-Second Street and Josephine Avenue in South Side Flats to Salisbury Street in St. Clair, between Fernleaf and Sterling Streets. The only evidence of the upper station house is a sign, likely created by a local resident interested in the area's history.

Learn more about Pittsburgh's old inclines here.

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

And across the street you will find another historical sign, created by the same enthusiastic local historian, noting the location of Fort Laughlin, a Civil War redoubt built in 1863. Learn more about the numerous fortifications that were built in Pittsburgh in response to Robert E. Lee's Invasion of Pennsylvania here. [Pittsburgh's forgotten Civil War fortifications \(penncivilwar.com\)](http://penncivilwar.com)

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