

Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours

Squirrel Hill North

“. . . out of history into history . . .”

Robert Penn Warren, All the King's Men

Squirrel Hill's history began in the southern part of the neighborhood in 1760, in a settlement along the Monongahela River known as Summerset. That's where Colonel James Burd built the neighborhood's first home. Reflecting the trajectory of Pittsburgh's history, the site is today a modern housing development, reclaimed from a United States Steel slag heap.

Because the area was thickly forested and very hilly, even by Pittsburgh's standards, it was slow to develop. As a result, the neighborhood is enriched by Pittsburgh's two largest parks, Schenley Park and Frick Park.

For additional information about Squirrel Hill, click here

<https://www.pittsburghbeautiful.com/2020/02/01/squirrel-hill/> and here.

<https://squirrelhillhistory.org/squirrel-hill-history/>

Even though most of this tour takes place along some of Squirrel Hill's busy major streets – Forbes Avenue, Beeler Street, Wilkins Avenue, and Fifth Avenue – it still has the feel of a pleasant neighborhood stroll along tree-lined streets. Early in the walk you pass large, older homes, both singles and doubles. By the time you reach Devon Road you are walking by majestic homes with beautifully landscaped gardens and yards. There are four sets of steps on the walk, with a total of 252 steps.

This walk is about 1.9 miles long and should take you less than an hour to complete. The map that accompanies this tour displays the location of the staircases you will encounter. This tour is current as of May 2023.

Start your tour near the intersection of Margaret Morrison Street and Forbes Avenue. I found convenient metered parking on Margaret Morrison Street. Margaret Morrison was the mother of Andrew Carnegie. He honored her by naming one of the four Carnegie Technical Schools he founded in 1906 after her. Learn more about Margaret Morrison here.

<https://design.cmu.edu/content/woman-her-legacy-brief-history-margaret-morrison>



Normlee Place Steps

Turn right on Forbes Avenue to begin this tour. The first set of steps leads from Forbes Avenue, opposite Normlee Place, to Gladstone Road. This staircase ascends to your right. It is not known when these 90 steps were built. A thoughtful and caring neighbor had placed a pot of flowers at the entrance to the top of the steps.

Now return to Forbes Avenue, turn left, and then turn right when you reach Beeler Street.

Opposite Olympia Place you will find the next set of steps on this tour, on your right. These 60 steps ascend to Beelermont Place, where you reach a

sidewalk that goes left and right, serving five houses. The right pillar at the bottom of these steps bears an inscription of the company that built the steps – “Nick Scotti, Concrete Contr, 486-1962.” I have not noticed this on any other set of steps. Scotti is still in business, still using the same phone number. A link to their website is here.

<https://www.nickscotticoncrete.com/>



Steps at Beeler St. and Olympia Way



1889 Building

Return to Beeler Street and turn right. Turn left when you reach Wilkins Avenue and continue to Fifth Avenue, where you will again turn left. You will see four steps connecting the two streets, and across Fifth Avenue you will see a three-story building, proudly and ornately declaring it was built in 1889.

As you walk along Fifth Avenue you will pass Sunnylegde Residential Hotel on your left. Built in 1886, the structure was originally the home and office of Dr. James H. McClelland,

personal physician of Andrew Carnegie and founder of Shadyside Hospital. Farther along Fifth Avenue, on your right you will see the stately Mansions on Fifth, a boutique hotel that also hosts meetings, retreats,



Mansions on Fifth

banquets, and other events. Learn about the mansion's history here.

<https://mansionsonfifth.com/history-mansions-on-fifth.php>

After you pass Amberson Avenue, which leads off Fifth Avenue on your right, look for the Devon Road steps on your left. These 98 steps lead up to Warwick Terrace. Turn right on



Devon Road Steps

Warwick Terrace and then left on Devon Road. The grand and stately homes along Devon Road have beautifully maintained gardens and yards, some containing boxwood. My mother once told me, "You know you're rich if you have boxwood." One of the many houses I've owned over several decades had lots of boxwood in the yard, proving Mom wasn't ALWAYS right.

Off to your right as you walk down Devon Road you can view the omnipresent Cathedral of Learning, a striking sight on many of these steps tours. <https://www.tour.pitt.edu/tour/cathedral-learning>

Another striking sight awaits you when you arrive at Forbes Avenue. You'll have a good view of the Carnegie Mellon University campus, including the "Walking to the Sky" sculpture. Learn more about this ambitious work of art here.

<https://www.cmu.edu/cmtoday/issues/june-2006-issue/news-flash/jonathan-borofsky-s-walking-to-the-sky-comes-to-campus/>

We began our walk with a nod to the past, an homage to Andrew Carnegie's mother, Margaret Morrison, and are finishing it with a soaring statement of hope for the future. And as you turn left on Forbes Avenue to return to your starting point, be glad that none of the stairways you encountered were as steep as Jonathan Borofsky's sculpture!



Walking to the Sky

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