

Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours – West End

Little Known Facts

Some confusion exists when Pittsburghers refer to “West End.” For some, West End comprises several neighborhoods that sit west of downtown – Sheraden, Elliott, Windgap, Chartiers City, and West End itself. For others, West End is the separate neighborhood of, well, West End. Historically, the neighborhood of West End was referred to as West End Village by some. For our purposes, we will be touring the Pittsburgh City Steps that are located in the neighborhood of West End.

Originally part of St. Clair Township, present-day West End was first laid out as Temperanceville, a dry town, in 1837 and was later annexed to the City of Pittsburgh in 1874. The area’s earliest extant building, the Old Stone Inn, dates to 1756. Lumber mills, glass works, and salt and coal mines were early industries in the area. As was the case throughout Pittsburgh, European immigrants powered these industries.

West End’s relatively small size – about 0.2 square mile – belies its rich history, which you can learn more about here. <http://www.kathrynbashaar.com/2019/09/temperanceville/>



West End Savings Bank & Trust Company

This short, pleasant steps tour is less than three-quarters of a mile long and takes about one-half hour. You will encounter three staircases comprised of 84 steps. This tour is current as of May 2024.

Begin your tour at the intersection of South Main Street and Noblestown Road, where Noblestown Road, arriving from the south, takes a sharp right turn and joins South Main Street, the neighborhood’s business corridor. I found convenient street parking on South Main Street. Before heading west up South Main Street, admire the stately West End Savings Bank & Trust Company building, dating to 1926. The lovely structure speaks to a time when West End’s population was more than ten times today’s population of about 250 and South Main Street was much busier than it is today, supporting a bank with as grand a scope as this one.

Something else you will likely notice before you begin your trek up South Main Street is a set of steps along Walbridge Street, on your left. You will also see a set of steps enticingly leading up into the woods along Walbridge Street. These are in Elliott, so save them for another day.

As you begin walking up South Main Street you will see a large church across the street on your left. This is the former West End United Methodist Church, built 1887-1889. The church's architect was Frank E. Alden. Alden and his partners had offices in Boston and Pittsburgh. Their extensive work includes most of the Carnegie Library branches in the Pittsburgh area.



West End United Methodist Church

Walk on after admiring the church and soon on your right you will see a walkway leading to a set of steps climbing up into a treed area. These 51 steps were built in 1941 and take you to Steuben Street, where you will turn right.



Steps from South Main Street to Steuben Street

The first street joining you from the right is Wabash Street. On the corner of Wabash and Steuben Streets is a three-story vacant building. This building, constructed in 1865, was the Odd Fellows Hall. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows has existed in the United States since 1806 and is one of many fraternal organizations that developed in the Nineteenth Century.

Here is the first of two little-known facts I present in this tour. During the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, the Odd Fellows leased space in this building to the

General James A. Garfield Post #215 of the Grand Army of the Republic. The G.A.R. was the largest and most influential organization of Union Veterans of the Civil War. It began in 1866 and at its height, in 1890, it had about 410,000 members and 7,000 posts in communities across the country. Learn more about the G.A.R. here.

<https://suvcw.org/brief-history-of-the-grand-army-of-the-republic>



Wabash Street Steps

While the Garfield Post never had its own post room, there is another local G.A.R. post that did, but not before also renting space in an Odd Fellows Hall. This was the Captain Thomas Espy Post #153 in Carnegie. Chartered in 1879, the Espy post first rented space in the Odd Fellows Hall in Mansfield, which later merged with Chartiers to form Carnegie. In 1906, the post was able to secure its own post room in the Carnegie Library and Music Hall in Carnegie. The post room is likely the best preserved of the handful of G.A.R. posts that remain in the country. Learn more about the Espy post here. <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2015/02/11/pittsburghs-forgotten-civil-war-treasure/>



Sanctus Street Steps

Next to the Odd Fellows Hall you will find five steps on Wabash Street. Walk down and up these steps and then continue on your way along Steuben Street. On your left you will notice 162 Steuben Street, a two and a half story brick building constructed in 1911. I admired the tile work above the second story windows.

You soon reach the appropriately named Sanctus Street, which boasts churches on both its upper and lower corners. Presently the Jerusalem Baptist Church, the structure at the upper end of Sanctus Street was originally built as the German Evangelical Church in 1864, reflecting the influence of German immigrants arriving to work in West End's industries of the time. After you walk down the Sanctus Street steps, numbering 28 and built in 1960, you reach the impressive St.

James Roman

Catholic Church, dedicated in 1884.

Now turn right on South Main Street to return to your starting point. Along the way you will find impressive old buildings – the Hershberger Block Building on the right and the H. Daub Building, dating to 1890, on the left. Like the West End Savings Bank & Trust Company, they remind us of the days when West End “Village” had 10 times the population it does today. Nonetheless, South Main Street is a welcoming commercial area with some businesses “giving it a go.”

A South Main Street establishment I recommend heartily is Chaykhana Pittsburgh, a small, delightful restaurant serving Uzbeki cuisine. My steps tour led me there mid-afternoon on a weekday. The place was very



St. James Church

busy, and I heard nothing but languages other than English around me. I asked the owner what languages I was hearing. While noting he speaks Arabic, the owner told me I was hearing Russian and Uzbek; a nice accompaniment to my excellent lamb shank. Oh – and here is the second little-known fact I present in this tour. Uzbekistan is one of only two countries in the world that are double-landlocked. The other is Liechtenstein. A country is double-landlocked if it is surrounded by other landlocked countries. Who could have guessed that in a trivia contest?

POSTSCRIPT

The map that accompanies the City of Pittsburgh's City Steps Assessment shows two closed staircases in West End. One leads from Woodville Avenue to the abandoned China Street and the second continues from China Street up to the Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks. A satellite map shows that both sets of steps lead through woods. It also shows no structures on China Street or anywhere near the steps.

In May 2024 I was able to locate a sidewalk leading perpendicularly from Woodville Avenue up to the wooded hillside. I am certain it leads to the first closed staircase. But the thick underbrush and knotweed didn't allow me to continue or even see the steps. I then walked up Greentree Road and found the opening that leads to the abandoned China Street. Again, it was too brushy to proceed. I plan to return in the fall when less overgrowth makes for better viewing and, hopefully, some bushwhacking that will result in discovering the closed staircases.