



**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** If you would like to learn more about Mount Carmel's history, visit the Mount Carmel Public Library or the Northumberland County Historical Society located on the site of old Fort Augusta in the Hunter House, 1150 North Front Street, Sunbury, PA.

Please respect the privacy of the owners of these properties. The residences featured on this tour are not open to the public.

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## MOUNT CARMEL

MOUNT CARMEL PENNSYLVANIA 1884

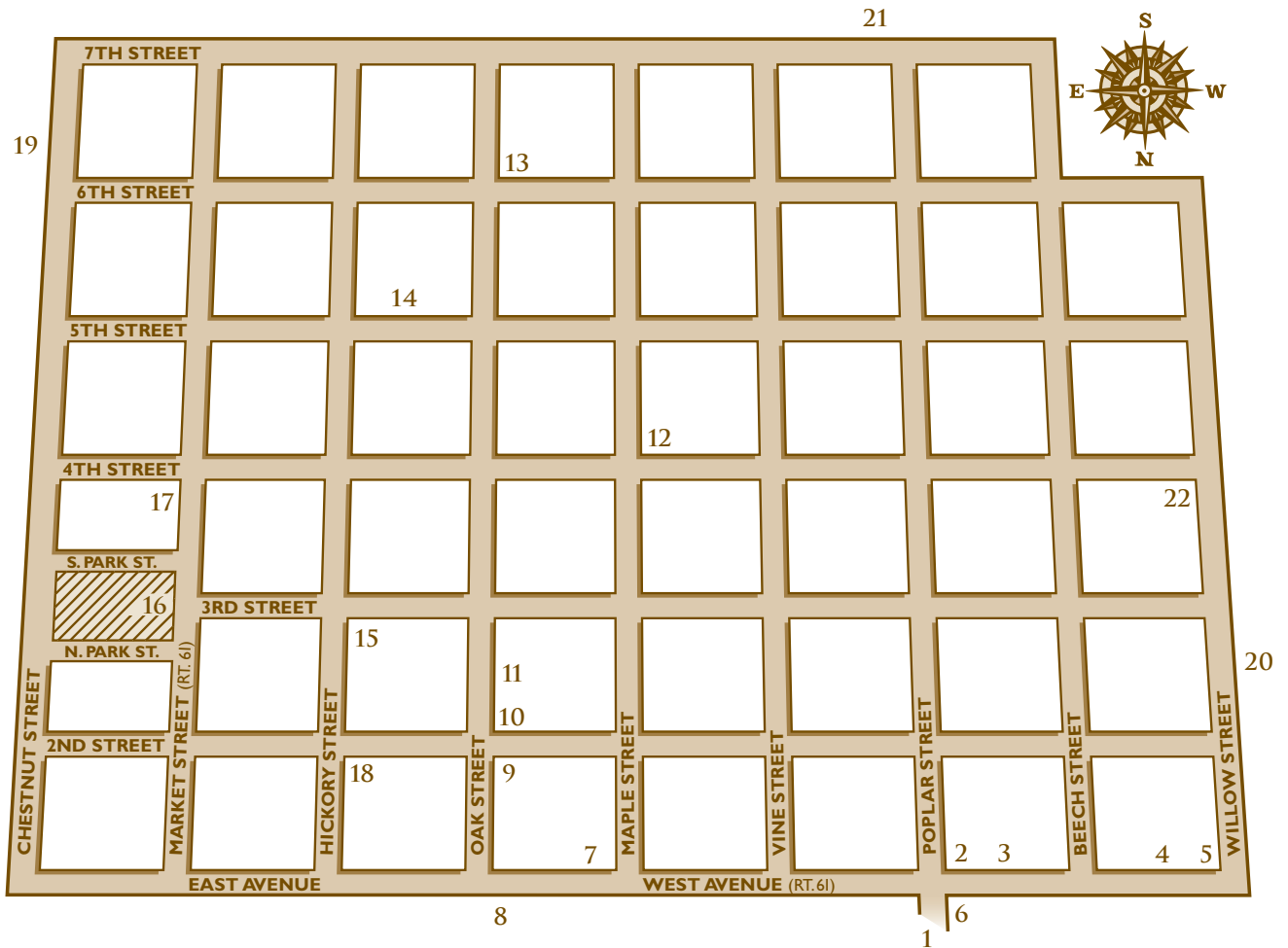
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Text by Hugh A. Jones, Esq.  
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WELCOME to Historic Mount Carmel! As you walk through Mount Carmel's Historic District on this self-guided tour, you will have the opportunity to learn about the history and architecture of an important early mining town. This community is proud of its heritage and committed to preserving it for future generations.



## HISTORY

The Borough of Mount Carmel was not incorporated until 1862, however, its beginnings may be traced to earlier times. The area that comprises the borough limits was traversed by the Centre Turnpike, which opened in 1808 and connected Reading with Sunbury. An inn was opened in 1812 and was given the Biblical name of Mount Carmel, which became the name of the township in 1854 and of the borough in 1862. The area inspired settlement due to an abundance of natural flowing springs, which still may be found today on the mountains south of the community, and by the discovery of coal in the 1840s.

In 1847, a group of land speculators, whose primary interest was the coal trade, purchased the tract of land now comprising Mount Carmel. Not surprisingly, they were many of the judges and political figures in both Northumberland and Schuylkill Counties. This group organized a land company and within a few years had the tract surveyed and a town plot laid out. They soon began selling lots and the town, as it is today, is based on the plot developed by this group in 1853.

Owing to the rich deposits of anthracite coal under and surrounding Mount Carmel, coal mining began in the late 1840s and continues on a smaller scale even to this day. In 1891, nine coal mining operations were located in the vicinity. Three railroads, the Pennsylvania, the Lehigh Valley, and the Reading, passed through the community linking it to the great urban centers of the East and the West. Coal was shipped in both directions as the nation became dependent on coal for both industrial and domestic uses until the boom ended in the early 1950s.

A rich heritage of the multiple ethnic groups which settled Mount Carmel is evidenced by the number of churches erected since its early development, a testament to the faith, commitment, and work ethic of its early settlers whose descendants reside here today.

1

### THE VIADUCT



*Old 1931 View*

Mount Carmel is situated on an elevated plain, the north side of which is drained by the Shamokin Creek. When the Centre Turnpike was opened in 1808, it traversed the site of Mount Carmel by descending into the flood plain through what is now Diamondtown, and up the hill on what is currently Vine Street crossing Mount Carmel diagonally and exiting on the South over the Locust Mountain. Remnants of the Turnpike survive today as South Turnpike Street and North Turnpike Street.

In order to provide a direct approach into the town and eliminate the necessity of crossing the Pennsylvania and Lehigh Valley Railroad tracks, the first viaduct was constructed in 1930. Though the railroads are long gone, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation removed the original span and constructed the second viaduct on the same site in 2003.

2

### DIVINE REDEEMER ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



The most outstanding feature of Mount Carmel to visitors arriving from the north is the skyline of churches located on West Avenue. The first in the succession and the most architecturally prominent is the Divine Redeemer Roman Catholic Church, built in 1906 by predominantly Polish immigrants. Its beautiful illuminated clock tower can be seen from many vantage points in the community. Due to its commodious sanctuary, it became one of the three Roman Catholic parishes retained in Mount Carmel after consolidation by the Harrisburg Diocese several years ago. The beautiful stained glass windows that adorn the building are the second set of such windows. While the church was being built in 1906, the original windows were ordered in New York and arrived at the Lehigh Valley Station. Before they could be removed by the contractor, the station burned to the ground, and the windows were destroyed with it necessitating the creation of an entire second set.

3

**ST. PETER & PAUL BYZANTINE-UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Proceeding west, you come to the beautiful Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine-Ukrainian Catholic Church, dedicated in 1994 following a disastrous fire that completely destroyed the former structure, which had been built in 1914. The Byzantine Rite is followed by those who trace their ancestors from what

was once the Austro-Hungarian provinces of Galicia, Podcarpatska, Rus, and Unjver. The architecture reflects eastern European and Russian influences, evidenced by the characteristic onion domes and Byzantine crosses.

4

**ST. PETER'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

In the middle of the next block, between Beech and Willow Streets, is the former Saint Peter's Roman Catholic Church, built in 1906. Due to a consolidation by the Harrisburg Diocese several years ago, this church is no longer in use. Its founders were natives of the Italian-speaking province of the South Tyrol, which

had been part of Austria-Hungary until the end of World War I when it was ceded to Italy, as well as Italians from all parts of Italy. Years ago, when all of the churches were active on this street, a mixture of languages could be heard as well as the ringing of the bells of each church signifying services, funerals, weddings, and many other significant events in the religious lives of the communicants.

5

**ST. MICHAEL'S RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

At the end of this block, on the corner of West Avenue and Willow Street, Saint Michael's Russian Orthodox Church can be seen with its distinctive silver onion dome topped by Byzantine crosses. This church was founded in 1908 by Eastern Europeans of Slavic descent, whose Orthodox Christian faith is still followed to this day.

6

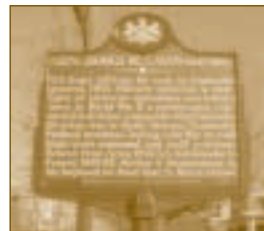
**ST. MATTHEW'S LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Cross the street and proceed back to the corner of Poplar Street. On the northwest corner is Saint Matthew's Lutheran Church, or, as some have called it, the "Little Church on the Corner." It was built in 1888, by Lutherans of Slovak background. For many years, as in all of the churches in this area, the liturgy

was conducted in the native tongue. Most of the members of this church are the descendants of the original members.

Thus, in a matter of two blocks, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the community becomes apparent.

7

**AMERICAN LEGION/ LT. GAVIN MEMORIAL & MARKER**

Proceed for another two blocks, and at the southeast corner of Maple Street and West Avenue is a historical marker erected by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission honoring Lieutenant General James M. Gavin. Opposite the marker, in the yard of the American Legion Post, is a memorial to General Gavin, who pioneered airborne operations in the U.S. Army and was Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne Division during World War II. Though not a native of Mount Carmel, General Gavin spent his early boyhood here before his enlistment in the Army and his eventual appointment to West Point. He regarded Mount

Carmel as his hometown and returned several times following the end of World War II until his death in 1990.

The imposing house on the same site, which is now the American Legion Post, was the home of W.A. Phillips, a

*(continued inside)*



### 7 AMERICAN LEGION/LT. GAVIN MEMORIAL & MARKER (CONT.)

wealthy coal operator who built it around 1904. Phillips was born in poverty in Wales, where he became familiar with the coal industry in that country. At an early age, he emigrated to Pennsylvania and amassed a fortune in coal with holdings in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Kentucky. The architecture of the building is the popular Queen Anne style of the late Victorian period.

### 8 OLD BOROUGH HALL & LOCKUP



An eastward stroll for three-quarters of a block brings you to Oak Street, the main thoroughfare of Mount Carmel. Looking to your left, across the street at the head of Oak Street is the Old Borough Hall and Lockup. Erected in the 1880s, when the operation of the municipal government was much simpler,

this building served as the police station and borough council chambers until the early 1960s when those offices required larger accommodations. The police lockup was in the basement. In 1961, the first public library was housed here until that, too, outgrew the facility.

### 9 NATIONAL HOTEL



Walking one block south on Oak Street on the west side, you come to the corner of Second Street and the National Hotel. It is one of the oldest buildings in Mount Carmel, erected by Thomas Scott in the late 1860s. Descendants of the

original owners reside in Mount Carmel to this day. When the Edison plant was being erected in 1882, Edison's representatives stayed here owing to the proximity of the homes of the principal officers of the Mount Carmel Company.

### 10 HOME OF WILLIAM SCHWENK



Continuing on the west side of Oak Street, cross Second Street and walk one-half block. There is a single brick dwelling, set back from the street. This was the home of William Schwenk, one of the early coal operators of Mount Carmel. Schwenk was also a leading stockholder in the Edison Electric Plant. On January 22, 1884, his residence became the first home, and one of the first buildings in the world, to be lighted by electricity. The house also saw its share of tragedy. On August 11, 1876, Schwenk's infant daughter rolled out of bed and fell through the second story window to her death on the pavement below.

### 11 WILLIAM T. MONTELIUS HOUSE & STORE



A few doors south on the same side of the street is the William T. Montelius house and store. In its day, it was the showcase of trendy fashion, exhibiting the French Second Empire style of architecture with a mansard roof. Built in 1873-74, it was one of the newer homes on this side of the street after a disastrous fire wiped out the entire block on July 24, 1873. Montelius was the brother of Alfred Montelius, another of the pioneer coal operators in Mount Carmel. Generations of Mount Carmelites have been amused at the concrete outline of a frog on the door frame to the right of the building. See if you can find it.



*Old 1884 View*

### 12 ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH



Continue south on Oak Street for one and one-half blocks to Fourth Street. Cross the street and proceed another one and one-half blocks until you arrive at Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church.

12

**ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH (CONT.)**

*Edison Electric Plant  
1884 View*

This was the site of the Edison Electric Plant in Mount Carmel, one of the first in the world, having been established in 1883. In the 1890s, the church bought the former plant, and in 1900, the present church was built. The Edison Plant expanded and relocated to another part of town. The Edison Plant in Mount Carmel was the eighth in

the world, following other plants in Sunbury and Shamokin, all in Northumberland County.

The organ in the Episcopal Church was donated by the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie and is still in use.

13

**THOMAS M. RIGHTER HOUSE & MT. CARMEL COLLIERY**

Retrace your footsteps back to Oak Street, then proceed two blocks on the west side of the street to Sixth Street. Here is the former home of Thomas M. Righter, coal baron and pioneer capitalist of Mount Carmel. Righter's holdings were so vast



*Old 1884 View*

his son Walter held a seat on the New York Stock Exchange. Originally from Mauch Chunk (now Jim Thorpe), he married into the famous Leisenring coal family

of which much has been written. Righter was one of the founders of the Electric Company, the Water Company, and the Union National Bank. A tennis court once existed on the southern portion of the grounds. This home, though

not the first, was one of the earliest in the community to be lighted by electricity.



*Old 1884 View*

Righter was the proprietor of the Mount Carmel Colliery situated just east of Mount

Carmel. This coal mining operation was originally opened in 1859, and for twenty-two years was owned by various companies. In 1882, the leaseholders were Montelius, Robinson, & Company. In that year, Robinson's interests were purchased by E.B. Leisenring and Thomas M. Righter, and the company was then known as Montelius, Righter, & Company. Finally, in 1886, after the death of Alfred Montelius, the operation became Thomas M. Righter & Company until purchased by the Lehigh Valley Coal Company in about 1900. In 1896, 59,126 tons of coal were mined and 223 men were employed. This colliery had the distinction of being the only operation with the ability to ship coal directly over the Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, and Reading Railroads.

14

**FIFTH STREET—1906 MINERS DISPUTE**

Again retrace your steps on Oak Street, this time on the eastern side to Fifth Street. In this area, just off the main street, in April 1906 striking miners were shot by twenty-one troopers of the State Constabulary, the forerunner of today's Pennsylvania State Police. Ten men were wounded, but all miraculously survived. Along with the development of the coal industry came labor strife, as miners attempted to improve working conditions and receive better compensation.

15

**JUDGE LINCOLN S. WALTER HOUSE**

Continue north on Oak Street to Third Street, then turn right on Third and proceed east for one block. At the corner of Third and Hickory Streets is the former house of Judge Lincoln S. Walter. Judge Walter

was a prominent judge, attorney, and ardent politician. William Jennings Bryan, three-time candidate for the U.S. presidency, had dinner and stayed overnight in this house on February 25, 1903, while on a speaking tour for the Benevolent & Protective Order of Elks.

16

**ANTHRACITE STEAM FIRE COMPANY**

Two blocks east on Third Street is the well-known home of the Anthracite Steam Fire Company, the oldest fire organization in Mount Carmel. It was established in 1882. The founding of this company was the culmination of a community-wide effort for a permanent fire brigade after such destructive fires as that of July 1873.



*Town Park 1930 View*

The firehouse is built on the site of the Town Park, a plot reserved by the land company that laid out

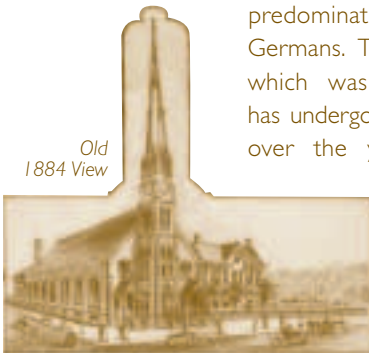
Mount Carmel in 1853 as a plot to be used solely for community purposes. It remains so used to this day.

17

**THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL**

One block south is The Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The first church was built on the corner of Fourth and Market Streets in 1869. It was the first Roman Catholic Church to be erected in the Borough of Mount Carmel, and was established predominately by Irish and Germans. The present structure which was dedicated in 1888, has undergone several renovations over the years to achieve its present appearance.

*Old 1884 View*



It remains one of the largest and most influential churches in the community.

18

**MATTHEW KEAR WATKINS HOUSE**

Retrace your steps back to Third and Hickory Streets and proceed north on Hickory Street one block to Second Street. On the northwest corner of Second and Hickory Streets is the grand former home of Matthew Kear Watkins, organizer of the Mount Carmel Water Company, First National Bank, Electric Company, and many other community businesses including the first newspaper. The street on which this



*Old 1884 View*

stately home is located is one of the most Victorian in the community, lined with the former homes of doctors and industrialists. Watkins' descendants lived in this house until about twenty-five years ago.

**JUST A SHORT DRIVE**

19

**PATRICK DONOHUE HOUSE**

Though not part of the walking tour, the Donohue stone house, located on South Turnpike Street, between Sixth and Seventh Streets, is the oldest house in Mount Carmel. It was built around 1866 by Patrick Donohue, one of the first coal operators. Just a few feet away is a row of houses, known as Donohue Row, built at about the same time for workmen in his mine. The Donohue home faces Turnpike Street, which is actually a remnant of the Centre Turnpike first opened in 1808.

The house also served as a hotel in former years, known as the Midway Hotel. It is now a private residence.

20 MOUNT CARMEL AREA HIGH SCHOOL STADIUM



Another site not on the walking tour is the Mount Carmel Area High School Stadium or "Silver Bowl," as it is more commonly known. It was built on this site in 1931, and has the distinction of being one of the first high school stadiums in the state to have lighting for night games, no small feat for a high school in the midst of the Great Depression. The local high school football team, the "Red Tornadoes," who claim this complex as their home, have compiled a record of having the most wins of any high school team in the state and one of the top teams in the nation. This team has won many state and conference championships, many of which were held in this historic arena.

21 RELIANCE COLLIERY



Old 1884 View

Another mining operation located in the vicinity was the Reliance Colliery. It was located on Locust Mountain to the south, overlooking the community. Its four

remaining company houses may be seen from most locations in Mount Carmel. It was started in 1867, by Thomas Baumgardner, one of the members of the company that laid out the town plot. This operation passed into the ownership of the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company around the turn of the century. In 1896, it mined 134,216 tons of coal and employed 436 men.

22 MATTUCCI'S RESTAURANT



Just a few short blocks from the end of the walking tour is Mattucci's Willow Café at the corner of Fourth and Willow Streets. Famous throughout the region for its fine cuisine, the restaurant was first opened in 1934 by Nicholas Mattucci and continues its success through four generations of stewardship. The restaurant remains one of the oldest family-operated businesses in Mount Carmel. The strong family coal region work ethic has enabled this business to survive the throes of the Depression from whence it began, to the 21st Century, where it thrives today.



*Forty years I worked with pick and drill*

*Down in the mines against my will,*

*The Coal King's slave, but now it's passed;*

*Thanks be to God, I'm free at last...*

*Coal Miner's Epitaph*