



Tribune-Review

The Carrie Blast Furnaces is a former steel plant and is part of the Rivers of Steel Heritage Area in Pennsylvania.

Former steel foundries find new life as tourism destinations, arts venues

By Jeff Himler, triblive.com

Over the past three decades, the Pennsylvania Heritage Area Program has grown to cover every corner of the state — and nearly all of the middle, too. It has also matured to pump billions of tourist dollars into local economies each year.

Launched in 1989 after a decade of planning, the program now includes 12 sectors that span 57 of 67 counties, crossing boundaries to connect places that share common themes in Pennsylvania's continuing story.

All of Southwestern Pennsylvania is covered by at least one of four heritage areas: Allegheny Ridge, Lincoln Highway, National Road and, the largest, Rivers of Steel. Only the National Road corridor does not encompass at least parts of

Allegheny and Westmoreland counties.

Treasured places such as Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater and Bedford's coffee pot-shaped building are part of the regional heritage mix. Other pieces of the past have taken on a new life, like the former Carrie Blast Furnaces in Rankin.

The towering remnant of Pittsburgh's once-dominant heavy industry attracts those who want to discover or revisit the spot where iron was produced to fuel steel production at the Homestead Works. Others have found inspiration there for artistic endeavors and movie shoots.

"It was started purely for historic preservation and managing projects, and it's grown into something that

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The tour expands knowledge of the 1831 Snowtown Riot.

Early black history revealed on tour

Providence Walks: Early Black History, a self-guided walking tour, is intended to be "an act of remembrance, which honors the lives of those whose stories are only partially known, but who contributed significantly to the city you see today."

It's a collaboration among the Center for Reconciliation, the Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau, Stages of Freedom and the Rhode Island Historical Society.

The tour was written and researched by Elon Cook Lee, Traci Picard and Julia Renaud from the Center for Reconciliation, a racial reconciliation organization based in the Cathedral of St. John, the first stop on the tour.

The cathedral was funded, in part, by the slave trade.

The tour continues on to 13 other sites and five points of interest involving slavery and its enduring legacy.

Source: rimonthly.com

Birmingham site takes advantage of long history

Sloss Furnaces was once the largest manufacturer of pig iron in the world. It stands today just as it did in the late 19th century — a monument to the Industrial Revolution. With its web of pipes and towering stoves, this National Historic Landmark provides visitors a glimpse into Birmingham's rich industrial heritage.

Sloss Furnaces operated from 1882-1970 making it the longest continually running blast furnace in Birmingham's history.

The welcome center opened its gates in September 1983, as a



slossfurnaces.com

Sloss Furnaces in Birmingham, Ala., operated from 1882-1970. Sloss received National Historic Landmark designation in 1981.

museum of the City of Birmingham. Its collection consists of two 400-ton blast furnaces and some forty other buildings.

Nothing remains of the original furnace complex. The oldest building on site dates from 1902.

Sloss is currently the only twentieth-

century blast furnace in the U.S. being preserved and interpreted as an historic industrial site.

It is also a premier events venue for weddings, corporate functions, formals, birthday parties or reunions.

Source: slossfurnaces.com

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has become an integral part of Pennsylvania's tourism industry," Elissa Garofalo said of the heritage areas.

Garofalo is executive director of the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor and president of Heritage PA, a group that represents the state's dozen heritage areas.

"We have such a tremendous collection of historic sites in the state," she said.

Tourists spend an estimated 7.5 million days and nights total in Pennsylvania's heritage areas each year, buying more than \$2 billion worth of goods and services. About 70% of that spending occurs at heritage-related attractions, according to a 2016 report from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

Those figures were based on 2014

data — something tourism officials agree needs to be updated to show continued growth.

Yet even five years ago, the resulting contribution to the state economy was 25,708 jobs and about \$800 million in labor income, the study indicated.

The Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area includes eight counties: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Washington and Westmoreland. It traces the area's transformation from colonial frontier to industrial heartland and beyond.

A new economic impact study for the area will be released soon, eight years after its last one.

That old study indicated the Rivers of Steel region had attracted nearly 408,000 visitors over three years, resulting annually in about 878 jobs

and an economic benefit of just under \$67 million.

Much has changed since then that has helped to grow regional heritage tourism even more, according to Augie Carlino, Rivers of Steel president and CEO.

"In 2012, we were just barely getting into the Carrie Furnaces to begin stabilization and tours," he said. "Now, we're approaching close to 50,000 people going to that site."

A tour of central Rivers of Steel sites — including those associated with the 1892 Homestead lockout and strike at the Carnegie Steel Co. — can prompt visitors to explore other related attractions, such as steel industry exhibits at Pittsburgh's Senator John Heinz History Center and Clayton, the Point Breeze mansion of industrialist Henry Clay Frick.