

Mercersburg: A brief account –

Beginning in the middle 1700’s as a trading center, mill, and tannery site, the village that is now Mercersburg was owned by James Black. According to legend, Black purchased the land from the Indians for a gun and a string of beads. Black’s settlement was permitted to grow mainly because of the Peace Pipe and Tomahawk Rights he gained from the Indians by appeasing them with worldly goods.

In 1759 William Smith, Sr., acquired the land from James Black, and Black’s Town became Smith’s Town. Under Smith’s leadership the town’s population and its commerce increased. Smith died on March 25, 1775.

As a principal heir to his father’s considerable holdings, William Smith, Jr., laid out the town in 1786. He named the town Mercersburg in honor of Hugh Mercer. An officer in the French and Indian War, Mercer also served as a general under George Washington in the Revolutionary War. A physician, he came to Mercersburg in 1746. Mercer died in the Battle of Princetown in 1777.

Settlement of the town was not without adversity. Not only did local citizens have to defend themselves against attacks by the Indians, but they also added to the ranks of the Franklin County Cavalry and the Pennsylvania Militia and fought with the Revolutionary armies. Although local skirmishes occurred, they remained inconsequential. Later, during the Civil War, local men provided the Union with Company C, 125th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. The town survived numerous raids by the Rebel cavalry during the war.

Advantageously situated on the main wagon road from Baltimore to Pittsburgh (now Route 16), Smith’s Town, now Mercersburg, quickly became a center for commerce and travel.

In the early 1800’s Mercersburg became a center for education. The first was an eighteenth century Latin school. In 1836 Marshall College was chartered; the college soon exceeded its boundaries and was moved to the south end of town. Plagued by financial problems, Marshall College merged with Franklin in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1853. Likewise, the renowned Theological Seminary, closely associated with the Reformed Church, moved to Lancaster in 1871. Mercersburg College was active from 1865 until 1880. From this came the nationally known Mercersburg Academy, founded in 1893.

Mercersburg also contributed to local, state, and national history through outstanding people who lived here. Chief among them was our fifteenth President, James Buchanan. William Findley, a member of a prominent Mercersburg family, became Governor of Pennsylvania in 1817, and later served as a United States Senator. Just outside of town lived the Irwin sisters, Elizabeth and Jane. Jane married William Henry Harrison, Jr., 9th President of the United States, and she presided over the White House briefly in 1841. Her younger sister, Elizabeth married John Scott Harrison, and became the mother of Benjamin Harrison, 23rd President of the United States.

Mercersburg’s building environment reflected the prosperity, intellectual pursuits, and the values of its citizenry. It has left us with a precious and beautiful heritage which is now protected in the Mercersburg Historic District.

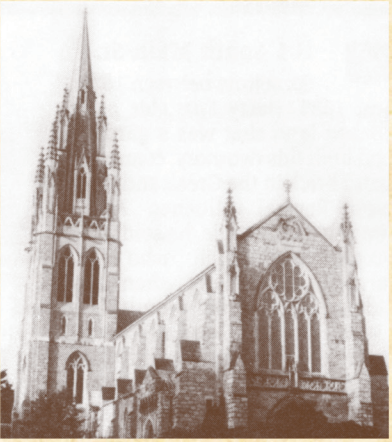
The town’s Historic District radiates from the center of town, extending south to the intersection of Routes 16 and 75 (Mercersburg Inn), one block north to Oregon and Park Streets, one block west to Park Avenue, and two blocks east to Rutledge Road.

Eighteenth century work is evident in some structures; however, most residents modernized or updated their properties from time to time. Consequently, elements of eighteenth and nineteenth century workmanship are intermingled with Federal, Greek Revival, and Victorian details.

Also, of interest ...

The Mercersburg Academy Chapel –

In addition to the walking tour, no visit to Mercersburg would be complete without seeing the magnificent American Gothic Chapel on the campus of the Mercersburg Academy. Built between 1924 and 1926 and designed by one of America’s foremost architects, Ralph Adams Cram, the Academy Chapel contains exquisite stained glass windows and oak carvings. They bear the thistle and rose motifs as memorials to the men of Mercersburg Academy who lost their lives in World War I. Carillon recitals on the forty-nine bell carillon in Barker Tower are given weekly on Sundays at 3:00 P.M. when school is in session.



The James Buchanan Log Cabin –

This log cabin was relocated to the campus of The

Mercersburg Academy from nearby Stony Batter, the birthplace of James Buchanan, the fifteenth President of the United States, and the only President from Pennsylvania.



Mileage/Location Information:

Mercersburg is situated on Pa. Route 16 approximately 10 miles west of Interstate 81, Exit 5 (Greencastle). Also, from 1-81 Exit 16 (Chambersburg), take Rt. 30 West to 416; go 8 miles to Mercersburg. From Pennsylvania Turnpike Exit 13 (Fort Littleton), take Rt. 522 South to McConnellsburg and Route 16 East to Mercersburg.

Brochure by Betty Stenger Photography by Melvin Stenger
More Information: Mercersburg Area Chamber of Commerce
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Walking Tour Guide

Mercersburg Historic District



Mercersburg, Pennsylvania
Founded 1750

Listed on National Register
of Historic Places
U.S. Department of the Interior

Starting your tour:

Buildings were chosen for the tour due to their architectural merit and historic associations. However, Mercersburg has other fine buildings, so you are encouraged to look around and enjoy those that could not be included in this brochure.

1. 5 North Main Street - McKinstry House

A native of Belfast, Ireland, William McKinstry came to Mercersburg about 1796. Within a few years he purchased a general store from James Buchanan, Sr. An enterprising businessman, McKinstry published the town’s first newspaper, *The Visitar*, forerunner of *The Mercersburg Journal*. This is Franklin County’s oldest established industry. McKinstry became the area’s most prominent builder; the town is indebted to him for many of its lovely, large buildings. In 1810, he designed and built for his residence and general store what is now McKinstry House. The building shows the Georgian influence. McKinstry represented Franklin County in the Legislature from 1838 until 1840. Dated 1848, large fancy graffiti in the stairway leading to the attic advises, “Vote for Henry Clay of Tennessee.”



2. 11 North Main Street

Built in 1847 by Judge James Carson, a friend of James Buchanan, this brick building replaced two log cabins. The unique eyebrow windows in the attic are typical of the Greek Revival style. This house had the first bake oven in town.



3. 17 North Main Street - The Buchanan Hotel

In 1796, James Buchanan, Sr., erected this large and handsome brick house. Here the future president, James Buchanan, spent his boyhood. It was then purchased by James O. Carson and later by the McAfee brothers, who enlarged it in the Italianate style, converted it to a hotel, and in 1909 sold it to C. W. McLaughlin, who named it Hotel Mercer. His son, Jack McLaughlin, renamed it James. Buchanan Hotel.



4. 39 North Main Street The Creigh House

This house was named for Thomas Creigh, D.O., our fourth Presbyterian minister. Dr. Creigh was a member of the Board of Regents of Marshall College and a founder of Wilson College in



Chambersburg, PA. This Federal style house was built in 1792. It has nine fireplaces; one is of black marble with a Latrobe stove. The house first served as a tavern, then became a center for fashion and dancing. The ballroom was two rooms separated by a very large door constructed to swing upward, where it hung suspended from a hook in the ceiling.

5. 47 North Main Street

William Smith, who first laid out the town, left directions at his death that a “neat and commodious house of middling size” be erected for his wife and daughter Sarah. So, this two-story gray limestone house was built in the Georgian/Colonial style. In the late 1800’s a one story addition was built to the rear of the house. Inside, the first floor reflects 1900 renovation, while the second story reflects its original style and design. The spacious entry is adorned with Tiffany glass in the semi-circular fanlight and vertical Sidelights. This and columned porches give the house a neo-classical appearance.



6. 52 North Main Street

William Smith purchased this plot of ground from James Black, the town’s first known settler, in 1759. Jacob McFarren built a brick “Mansion Hotel.” This became a popular tavern on the heavily traveled highway. After the tavern burned, the McAfees constructed this ten-room Georgian Revival style dwelling in the early twentieth century.



7. 30 North Main Street

This dwelling of Greek Revival influence was once two houses, one occupied by a hatter. Both were purchased by Matthew Smith, who built a central hall that brought them together as a single residence. On the first floor is a boming room, adorned with fancy scrollwork. Ornate woodwork adorns its many fireplaces, and stained glass is found throughout the first story. The house dates from the middle 1800’s.



8. 26 North Main Street

Showing the Georgian influence, “Old Stones” was built in 1785 and enlarged in 1830 by Joseph Cowan, who operated a carpenter’s shop in the backyard. The shop is now a summer kitchen. A smokehouse, a horse barn, an outhouse, and a well complete the property. The basement of this ten-room stone structure served as Mercersburg Savings Fund in the 1850’s.



9. 22-24 North Main St.

This brick house was built during the late 1700’s. With eight rooms and eight fireplaces, the house has turned ballusters with scrollwork on the stairs. The facade features keystones above the lintels, a popular decoration of the Colonial period. Hand hewn beams (probably oak) still covered with bark are found in the front of the house. A horse and cow barn with German siding and a stone foundation stand at the rear of the property. The house next door (24) shares many of these same characteristics. Attached to the rear is a smokehouse.



10. 16 North Main Street

After serving as a Captain Lieutenant in the Second Continental Artillery, Robert Parker was appointed Collector of Excise for Franklin County. He settled in Mercersburg and married William Smith’s daughter Sarah. He built a stone mansion, which is now Fendrick Library. In the Georgian influence, the house was built of native limestone in 1788. It features Georgian molding and fireplace mantels with finely carved detail. Leading to the passageway over the alley is a wide plank door with original strap hinges. It retains its original style and woodwork.



11. 14 North Main Street - The Lane House

Across the street from James Buchanan’s boyhood home is the Lane House. Featuring Georgian architecture, the house was built in 1828 by Thomas Lane but occupied by Elliott Lane, who married Jane Buchanan, sister of James Buchanan. Elliott and Jane were the parents of Harriet, who served as hostess at the White House during her uncle’s presidency. The house features hand-carved woodwork and handsome archways. Distinguishing the house is a hallway with a very unusual curved ceiling that runs from the front to the rear and ten fireplace mantels, each with a different design. A backyard springhouse contains a Pennsylvania type pump.



12. 23 West Seminary St. - Star Theater

This early 20th century, Classical Revival style movie theater first showed silent films. Frank Myers purchased the theater in 1927. His son, Raymond, and Judy Glaser often pumped the organ that supplied the background music for the films. By 1932 records were synchronized with the films, often causing trouble for the operator. During the Depression admission to benefit movies was canned goods or other non-perishable foods to help supply soup kitchens.



WALKING TOUR OF HISTORIC MERCERSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

13. 34 West Seminary St. Presbyterian Church

This Presbyterian Church of the Scotch-Irish was destined to play a role in the frontier settlement. Built in 1794 and known today as the Presbyterian Church of the Upper West Conococheague, this followed the Scotch-Irish church located in Church Hill which was disbanded because of disturbances by the Indians. The Church established Sunday School in 1816 and prayer meeting in 1818. In Romanesque Revival style, the structure is of native limestone.



14. 32 West Seminary St.

This lot once marked the western boundary of the town. In 1840 it was transferred to Marshall College. Built in the early 1850's in the Greek Revival and Gothic Revival influence, the log structure was once a school house. In 1880, a Dr. Unger bought it and added a second story for use as his home and office.



15. 2-6 South Main St. - The Mansion House

Built around 1790, the Italianate style Mansion House was used by Marshall College from 1840-1945. Afterwards operated by Colonel Murphy, it was often crowded with strangers from near and far; it has figured prominently in the history of the town. In 1852 future president James Buchanan, standing on the balcony, addressed a crowd in Center Square.



16. 12 South Main St. - First National Bank

The First National Bank of Mercersburg, with exterior front walls of Indiana limestone and entrance steps of Mount Airy marble, was built in 1927. The remaining walls are Kittanning brick with a base and trim of concrete stone. The style of the building is Neo-Classical Revival. Double doors open into a vestibule, behind which is the "public space," a large room where business is still conducted. The floor of the public space is silver gray Tennessee marble.



17. 30 South Main Street

Combining the Federal and Greek Revival influence, this house was built in 1786 in Flemish bond brick. It has a unique entry which features both a straight transom with side lights and lintels with bulls eye scrollwork above both door and windows. The bulls eye design is carried throughout the house. A four-foot wide medallion surrounds the hall chandelier. The ten-room house has six fireplaces; the stairway winds to the third floor, which was once a game room. The section to the right was once a drug store which featured a marble soda fountain.



18. 56-60 South Main St.

With its unique recessed entry, this Greek Revival dwelling, built in 1850 by Andrew Coyle, stands where Hugh McConnell made pottery before moving to East Seminary Street. It is known as the Rupley home, where Mrs. Rupley once conducted school. Having undergone very few changes, the house retains its historic integrity. Its high-ceilinged rooms feature empire style woodwork.



19. 122 South Main St.

Dating from the early nineteenth century, this is one of two stucco structures in the Historic District. Under the stucco and in the foundation are stones from the Old Stone Academy. The house shows the Greek Revival influence. The rear portion of the house is constructed of logs. Discovered when a wall was removed at the rear of the building, a large fireplace, now rebuilt, is reminiscent of an old-fashioned kitchen. Woodwork on the first floor carries a bullseye motif.



20. 128 South Main St. The Post Office

The Colonial Revival style building is of locally quarried limestone with granite steps; the vestibule and lobby have quarry tile flooring and wainscoting. Sculpted by Joseph Nicolai, the relief work above the door to the postmaster's office is titled "Good News." It depicts a farmer plowing his field with his wife bringing him his lunch and a letter with the good news that "the government has granted them their loan." At a cost of \$43,567.89, the construction superintendent wished to have "this building stand as a monument of excellent workmanship, exceeding anything of this type of construction within 100 miles of Mercersburg." At the dedication in 1937, Postmaster General James A. Farley was the principal speaker.



21. South Main Street at Linden Avenue - The Daub House

With five porches, sliding recessed doors (also called pocket or envelope doors), and five dormer windows in the attic, this house, known as Rosemont, stands on the same foundation as the former Presbyterian Church. Built by William H. Smith in 1910, the four-bedroom mansion is the Classical Revival style.



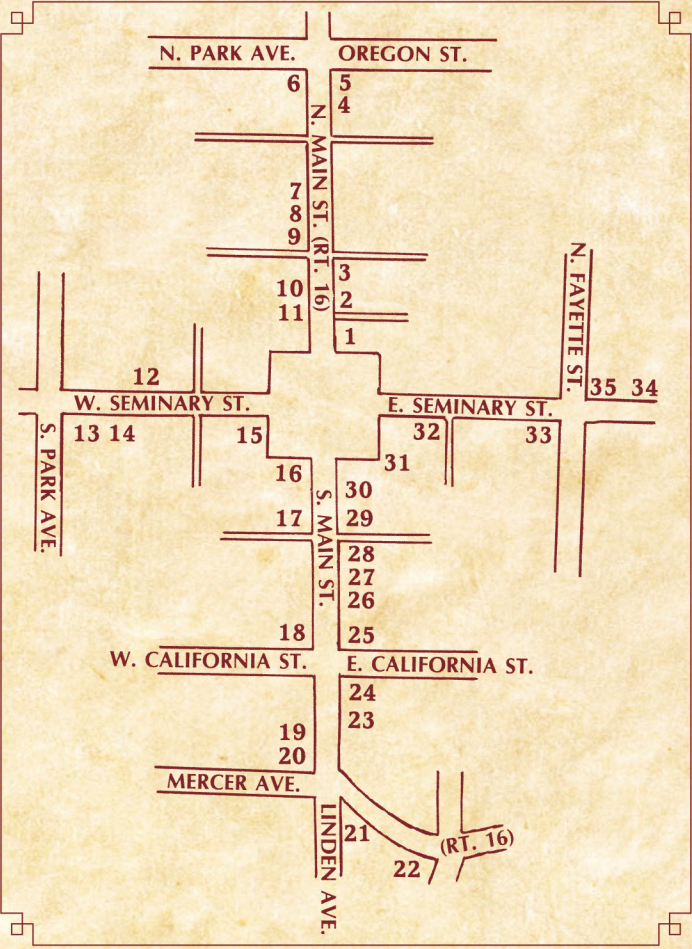
22. 405 South Main St. - The Mercersburg Inn

The Mercersburg Inn, formerly known as Prospect, was the residence of the Harry W. Byron family, who were prominent tanners. Built in 1909, the Colonial Revival style mansion features a grand entry hall with wrought iron balustrades on two curved stairways, one on either side, each leading to a common upstairs hallway. Stained glass is found at the top of the stairs both inside and outside and in the light fixtures. The grand hall also has scagliola columns, a very expensive process using kings plaster over metal with dyed silk threads pulled through the wet plaster to give the surface a marble-like finish. The Inn also has mahogany paneling, tile and white oak flooring, some inlaid. The arts and crafts style in the sun room is one of its most significant features.



23. 113 South Main St. - Borough Hall

As agreed upon by Borough Council president, J. M. Kuhn, and Franklin Keagy, contractor, this common bond, two-story brick structure has headers in every seventh course. Given just four months to complete this Colonial Revival style structure in "a good and workmanlike manner," the contractor had the work finished by December 31, 1904. The total cost was \$4,308.39, including stone window sills and lintels; the door sill, lintel, and quoins on two front corners are of Warsaw Blue stone. On July 19, 1909, Town Council authorized George W. Seylor, for the sum of \$375.00, to erect on Town Hall a wood tower to encase the works and belongings of a town clock.



24. 101 South Main St.

Sometime between 1820 and 1825, Harry Spangler purchased land that was a garden and built this two-story, common bond brick in the Greek and Colonial Revival influence. After renting it for awhile, he sold it to Frederick Waidlich, who enlarged it. Years later when the sidewalk was being rebuilt, what had been known as the "Waidlich well" was discovered. Water in the well was estimated to be forty to fifty feet deep. This was one of five or six wells that supplied water to the town prior to the installation of the present water system in 1912.



25. 57 South Main Street

The Georgian style house was built in the late 1700's. In the 1800's, a Captain Dick enlarged it and established a butcher shop, with the slaughterhouse at the rear of the lot. The brick style is Flemish bond; the house has twin chimneys on either end. The interior has seven fireplaces; the doors are of the St. George's Cross design.



26. 49 South Main Street

This residence of Georgian influence, a two-story log now encased with brick, was built around 1787. Prior to 1810 the house had no stairway. This gave protection from unfriendly Indians. Occupants used a ladder for access to the second floor. The house shares a common wall with the stone house next door.



27. 43 South Main Street

Mercersburg's first full-sized stone house was built in 1780 by Dr. William McGaw, a distinguished soldier and surgeon in the Revolutionary War. He served with the confidence and



esteem of General George Washington. After the war, he settled in Mercersburg and practiced medicine for forty years. With walls a foot thick, the house has ten fireplaces, all in operating condition. The section to the right was added a few years later.

28. 35 South Main Street

In the Colonial Revival style, this structure is of California brick. Interesting features include three tile fireplaces, one yellow, one maroon, and one green. Built in 1906, it has three pocket doors, oak woodwork, and arched cathedral-style windows on the south side.



29. 25 South Main Street

This stone residence dates to the late 1700's when corner fireplaces heated each room. The house has wide pine floors. The one story brick addition to the rear of the property once had two stories, a discovery made when the old roof was removed. The shed-roof barn at the rear of the yard was once a livery stable. After the arrival of the automobile, it housed the town taxi. The semi-attached log building to the right has been occupied by many businesses.



30. 13 South Main Street

This property was purchased in 1908 by the Board of Directors to be known as the First National Bank. The Chambersburg Granite Company was awarded the contract for stone work at a bid of \$1,250.00. This type is Neo-Classical Revival. The bank opened for business on February 1, 1909, with total assets of \$22,232.84, two full time workers, and a nightwatchman who earned 75¢ a night. It is known as the brownstone building.



31. 5-9-11 South Main St.

Mr. D. M. B. Shannon used the large stone house on the right as his place of business for many years. Dr. J. M. Kuhn also operated a drug store here. The remaining area, in the Italianate influence, in the southeast corner of the square was originally owned by Archibald Irwin and his wife Jane, who were the great-grandparents of United States President William Henry Harrison. This area was also used by a silversmith and clockmaker, a hatter, a saddler, a restaurateur, a grocery, and other small businesses.



32. 14 East Seminary St.

Just before the Civil War, William McKinstry, influenced by Federal and Greek Revival, built this two-story brick house. The wooden additions on both sides were constructed around 1900. Laid in the American bond style, the brick is soft and locally fired. The six over six windows are all original in the brick portion of the house. The roof was originally cedar shakes but was removed on half the house and replaced by tin shingles, handmade by Mr. George Rupley, who operated a tin shop in the addition to the west of the house. Two large chimneys are built into the east wall. The original brick sidewalk is still in place, and the structural integrity of the house is intact.



33. 32-34 E. Seminary St.

This residence once housed McConnell pottery. Hugh McConnell purchased the property on July 29, 1826, and built the pottery adjoining the house with ovens in the rear. A skilled craftsman, McConnell produced pottery and earthenware from 1826 until 1870; his son David ran the operation until about 1885. His products were of red clay and gray stone earthenware, some decorated in blue. Unfortunately, none carried a name or trademark. Following McConnell, it has been the home of a publisher, a shoemaker, and an attorney.



34. 129 E. Seminary St. - United Church of Christ

In the very early days of the town, members of the Lutheran and Reformed congregations worshiped and communed together. Soon both denominations outgrew a small log church and then a substantial stone structure. In 1835, both Marshall College, a forerunner of the Mercersburg Academy, and the Theological Seminary were established. From the Seminary came many noted theologians and the Mercersburg Theology. In 1845 trustees of the College allotted both funds and bricks for the erection of this imposing house of worship of Greek Revival design with Gothic detailing. Wounded Civil War soldiers were cared for in the Sunday School area of the church.



35. 101 E. Seminary St. - The United Methodist Church

Early records show that a Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in 1822. Ten years later Sabbath School was formed, and erection of the present structure was begun in 1834. During the Civil War the basement of the Church was converted into a hospital, providing care for soldiers from both sides. Old timers also told how a number of men on their way to Harpers Ferry during John Brown's raid encamped overnight in the basement of the Church. The town's first united prayer meeting was held here.

