

# 12 Must-See Historic Sites You Never Heard Of

Most of these places aren't "sites" at all. They have stories, but they don't exist primarily to be looked at. Some have staff; some don't. Costumed interpreters are rare. There is not a single visitor center. Several aren't even open regular hours; in those cases, you can call for an appointment or walk around the exterior. Expect to explore on your own and to use your imagination. A lot.

## Cynwyd Heritage Trail

Conshohocken State Road and Montgomery Avenue, Lower Merion, [cynwydheritagetrail.com](http://cynwydheritagetrail.com)



### WHAT IS IT?

A planned 350-acre linear park on the abandoned former right-of-way of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

### STATUS

The Cynwyd Heritage Trail belongs to Lower Merion Township, is part of the Montgomery County Trail System, and will be a branch of the Schuylkill River Trail.



## Delaware County Institute of Science

11 Veterans Square, Media; (610) 566-5126, [delcohistory.org](http://delcohistory.org)

Before science was a profession, amateur gentlemen did research on their own time, collecting specimens, talking about their findings with others and writing papers. In 1833, five such men formed an association for "the study and diffusion of general knowledge and the establishment of a museum." In 1867, the Delaware County Institute of Science built—and has since occupied—this structure just a block from the Delaware County courthouse.

The Delaware County Institute of Science is an independent, self-supporting nonprofit organization.

## Eden Cemetery

1434 Springfield Road, Collingdale; (610) 583-8737, [edencemetery.org](http://edencemetery.org)



The oldest black-owned public cemetery in the United States.

Eden Cemetery is on the National Register of Historic Places, and is the resting place of hundreds of prominent national and local "Old Philadelphia" blacks. Today, there are more than 80,000 people buried there.

## John Heinz National Wildlife Preserve

8601 Lindbergh Blvd., Philadelphia; (215) 365-3118, [fws.gov/heinz/index.html](http://fws.gov/heinz/index.html)



The Heinz refuge—which includes the last 200 acres of freshwater tidal marsh in Pennsylvania—is one of more than 500 in the National Wildlife Refuge System. This network of lands and waters is managed for the protection of wildlife and its habitat. It represents the most comprehensive program of its kind in the world.

The refuge was established by an act of Congress in 1972 and is administered by the Department of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## Jefferis Ford

Where a century-old bridge carries Route 842 across the eastern branch of Brandywine Creek; the border between East Bradford and Pocopson townships.

A spot on the Brandywine where the creek is broad but shallow. In colonial times, before the first bridge was constructed, this was a place at which farm animals, people on horseback or wagons could cross. The ford was named for the Jefferis family, members of which lived on both sides of the crossing.

Though not formally protected, Jefferis Ford is in a flood plain, which limits potential development. On the East Bradford side of the creek, the crossing is adjacent to River Park.

## The Lazaretto

99 Wanamaker Ave., Essington (behind the Lazaretto Ballroom), [ushistory.org/laz](http://ushistory.org/laz)

Built in 1799, the Lazaretto was the United States' first quarantine station for maritime travelers, and today is the oldest facility of its type. Ships once stopped here for inspection to prevent contaminated cargoes and infected passengers from coming ashore. In 1800, it was also the arrival point for the so-called "Ganges Africans," 134 people seized from two illegal slave ships off the coast of Cuba by the *U.S.S. Ganges*. Signed to indentureships, they eventually melted into the region's free black population. "Lazaretto" derives from St. Lazarus, the patron saint of lepers.

In 2005, Tincin Township proposed demolishing the Lazaretto to clear space for a new fire station. An outcry stopped that, but a new use for the facility has yet to be found.



## Lincoln University

1570 Baltimore Pike, Lincoln University, Oxford, (484) 365-8000, [lincoln.edu](http://lincoln.edu)

Founded in 1854, Lincoln University was the first institution in the world to offer higher education in the arts and sciences to black men. Now a state college, it has admitted women since 1952 and has an international, mixed-race student body.

Lincoln University formally associated with the Commonwealth as a state-related institution in 1972. It provides undergraduate and graduate courses to about 2,500 students and has an extension campus in Philadelphia.

## Museum of Mourning Art

Arlington Cemetery, 2900 State Road, Drexel Hill; (610) 259-5800, [arlingtoncemetery.us/museum.asp](http://arlingtoncemetery.us/museum.asp)



The Museum of Mourning Art shows how people coped with death in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Its emblems of death—skulls, skeletons, crossbones, lambs, angels, etc.—were used on books, clocks, bells, paintings, jewelry, clothing and other objects.

The museum is privately owned and operated.

## Okehocking Preserve

5316 West Chester Pike (at Garrett Mill Road), Newtown Square, [willistownparks.org/parks\\_okehocking.php](http://willistownparks.org/parks_okehocking.php)

These 180 acres are a remnant of the 500-acre tract given to the Lenape Indians by William Penn in 1701. The Okehocking Reservation was among the first created by European settlers for the native inhabitants—and, arguably, the best.

Okehocking Preserve was purchased with contributions from the Willistown Township Open Space Fund, the Willistown Conservation Trust, and county and state sources. The remaining 320 acres of the original reservation are on private property.



## People's Hall

Route 82, Ercildoun (about 3 miles from Coatesville)

A meeting hall built in 1845 for abolitionist meetings and lectures.

People's Hall is on the National Register of Historic Places. In fact, the entire hamlet (population about 100) is a historic district. It's now the headquarters of the East Fallowfield Historical Society.

## Printzhof

101 Taylor Ave., Essington



The site of New Gothenburg, a log fort, and the Printzhof, the home and headquarters of Swedish Gov. Johan Printz. This was the capital of "New Sweden" from 1643 to 1653. It was the first European settlement in what became Pennsylvania.

Governor Printz Park is a registered National Historic Landmark. The park was created in 1938 as a donation by the Swedish Colonial Society.

## Caleb Pusey House

15 Race St., Upland, Pennsylvania; (610) 874-5665, [home.comcast.net/~calebpuseyhouse/site/](http://home.comcast.net/~calebpuseyhouse/site/)

A stone house, built in 1683 in the traditional style of an English yeoman's cottage.

The site is operated by the Friends of the Caleb Pusey House, organized in 1960 to restore the home. The project received some state support but has survived on its own for the past 50 years. The Friends are currently seeking money to repair fire and flood damage.

Most historic sites exist because influential people or groups thought they were important. But, in fact, virtually every square inch of this old Earth is historic, and that's especially so around here. Europeans first came to Southeastern Pennsylvania almost 400 years ago and, of course, Native Americans lived here long before that. So, to regard as historic only the places where guides wear Smokey Bear hats is to miss a great deal.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The trail is a former industrial corridor with a collection of archaeological sites that includes evidence of Native American life, water-powered mills of the early 19th century, and the Pennsylvania Railroad, which laid track through there in 1884 to compete with its rival, the Reading Railroad. As important, it's an unusual example of historians and preservationists partnering with business and government to spur economic development.

Though there were once many such organizations, a surviving 19th-century gentlemen's science club and museum is a rarity. Consider the institute a monument to serious amateurs—and what they can do.

Eden is a souvenir of a time when desegregation was only a dream, and when blacks had trouble even finding a place to bury their dead. In 1902, when the cemetery opened, protesting white residents blocked the gate to the first burial, forcing a bereaved family to bury their mother after dark. It later received many transfers from Center City burial grounds that had been condemned by the growing city. Today, it is the burial site of civil rights activist Octavius Catto; William Still, a leader of the Underground Railroad; and soprano Marian Anderson.

The tidal marsh that Heinz protects is what most of riverside Delaware County looked like when the first Europeans arrived in 1634. Before the Swedes, Dutch and English got busy diking and draining it for grazing and other development, the shoreline totaled more than 5,700 acres. Now, it's mostly covered by I-95, the Philadelphia airport, factories and thousands of homes. But take a look—and imagine.

Don't let that "battlefield" on Route 1 in Chadds Ford fool you. Jefferis Ford is where George Washington effectively lost the Battle of the Brandywine on Sept. 11, 1777. The ford is where British Gen. Cornwallis sneaked unopposed across Brandywine Creek, with two-thirds of his 15,000-man army, while Washington spent the morning with his attention and guns focused on Chadds Ford. But all the British did there was make noise. By 2 p.m., Cornwallis' troops had marched south from Jefferis Ford and were at the Americans' rear. Squeezed on both sides, Washington did the only thing he could: He ran.

Whatever your opinion of the healthcare bill passed in 2010, the mere existence of the Lazaretto proves that government involvement in public health is not a newfangled idea. Philadelphia had a quarantine station as early as 1743, though it wasn't always effective due to a lack of resources. But, after 1793—when a devastating yellow fever epidemic killed 4,000-5,000 people—the city created a board of health, which operated the Lazaretto for nearly a century. Its function was then taken over by the Commonwealth.

Originally chartered as the Ashmun Institute, Lincoln was renamed in 1866 for the recently assassinated president, Abraham Lincoln. In the days of legal segregation, black youth in the South came here for an education that was unavailable closer to home. Lincoln alumni include U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall (pictured); poet Langston Hughes; band leader Cab Calloway; Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first president of Nigeria; and Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana.

Death still comes to everyone, but we live in an age in which most people die in hospitals, with their remains often whisked off to the crematory for private disposal at a convenient time. Increasingly, the viewing of corpses is becoming passé, and with it the communal experience of death through which people, culture and religion support each other. Knowing that there were—and are—other ways may be personally useful "when the time comes."

Indian reservations have earned a bad rap in U.S. history. In the 19th-century West, they were mostly crumbs of undesirable land given to Native Americans after whites had seized the best of it. The Okehocking, however, was a gift—not a jail. When a local Lenape clan complained that settlement was crowding their lifestyle, colonial authorities set aside 500 acres in Willistown Township for their use alone. The Indians traveled outside to work and trade, but Okehocking remained their home until they voluntarily moved west in the 1730s. It was later subdivided and sold.

Ercildoun is less than 15 miles from the border of Maryland, a slave state prior to 1865. So it was surely seen as a provocative act when local abolitionists built this stone structure to serve as a regular meeting place for antislavery meetings and lectures. Earlier meetings here had been broken up by mobs. In Philadelphia, a similar structure was burned on the day it opened in 1838. Fearing violence, local Quakers had refused to allow abolitionists to continue using their meetinghouse next door. Inside People's Hall, the slogan over the speaker's stand reads, "Let Truth and Error Grapple."

William Penn and his fellow Quakers get credit for their good relations with the region's Native Americans, but the Swedes—who arrived about 50 years earlier—laid the foundation for all that. Under Printz's leadership, they bought, rather than seized, the land they wanted and founded a thriving trade with the inhabitants. The colony was small, but New Sweden never had any of those nasty massacres or wars that were common elsewhere in colonial America. Naturally, this looked pretty good to the Dutch, headquartered in Manhattan, who seized the colony in 1651. The English kicked out the Dutch in 1664.

It is the oldest house in Pennsylvania and the only surviving structure in the United States that William Penn is known to have visited. (Pennsbury Manor is a 1930s reconstruction.) The original owner, Caleb Pusey (1650-1727) was a miller who served on the provincial supreme court. He was also an emissary between the colonial government and the Native Americans, and is credited with helping to peacefully resolve many conflicts.

## WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Lots of potential. The trail is evolving from abandoned, littered and overgrown to an actively maintained portion of the region's biking/hiking network. It will also be a venue for parades, festivals and concerts, and eventually provide easy pedestrian access from Lower Merion to Manayunk across an unused concrete railroad bridge—which ambitious horticulturists are already calling the "Bridge of Flowers."

The institute is what museums looked like before "high tech." Imagine dozens of glass cases filled with specimens—minerals, stuffed animals, fossils, bones—and thousands of books, many of which focus on the natural history of this area. There is also a regular lecture series.

A 53-acre site divided into 23 sections named for black heroes like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, and the original cemeteries from which many of the dead were moved.

Nature and gritty development come face to face. Within the refuge, canoeists on Darby Creek can see muskrats, opossum and the Sun Oil tank farm. There are year-round nature walks and programs, plus exhibits at the Cusano Environmental Education Center.

A narrow erector-set type of iron bridge, from which travelers can get a good look at the creek and the surrounding farms. A historical marker notes that Cornwallis "crossed here between 1 and 2 o'clock."

The Lazaretto isn't staffed or open to the public. The building is surrounded by a chain-link fence. Visitors can view the building through the fence.

A 422-acre campus with 56 buildings located in the rolling farmland of southern Chester County. The Langston Hughes Memorial Library has a special collection of African-American and African materials representing all aspects of the black experience.

Located within Arlington Cemetery, the museum is a replica of Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington. That's appropriate, since Washington's 1799 death inspired Americans to create and own mourning art on an unprecedented scale. Inside, there's a 19th-century, horse-drawn hearse and hundreds of objects related to death and dying.

The preserve offers 5 miles of walking trails, and ball fields are planned. A monument to the "Okehocking Indian Town" stands on the north side of West Chester Pike, roughly midway between Garrett Mill and Delchester roads.

A closed and locked building that resembles a one-room schoolhouse. Contact EFHS president Rusty Young (610-857-1824 or rdr0010@verizon.net) about access.

Visitors to the Printz site will find a 7-acre park with historical markers and the foundation of Gov. Printz's house. Thousands of Swedish artifacts excavated from the site are stored at the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia.

Tucked on an otherwise undeveloped back street between an incinerator and the headquarters of the Delaware County Housing Authority, the home stands on a 9-acre remnant of the 100 acres that Penn deeded to Pusey. Also on the property is the 1790 Pennock Log House and the 1849 Crozer School House's furnishings.