

HISTORIC WALKING TOUR: ALLENTOWN

The Liberty Bell, Art Deco theaters, and a city in renaissance

Allentown, the largest city in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, wears its history on its facades.

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THE LIBERTY BELL'S HIDING PLACE (ZION'S REFORMED CHURCH SITE)

Near 6th & Hamilton Streets, downtown Allentown (now Resurrected Life Community Church, UCC) — After the September 1777 Battle of Brandywine, the State House Bell, later the Liberty Bell, was hauled north and hidden beneath the floorboards of this church's basement until the British left Philadelphia in 1778, saving it from being melted into munitions. The on-site Liberty Bell Museum closed in 2023, so view the historic exterior here, then continue to the Heritage Museum (below) to see the collection.

LEHIGH VALLEY HERITAGE MUSEUM

432 Walnut Street, downtown Allentown — When the Liberty Bell Museum closed in 2023, its artifacts moved here, a few blocks from the original hiding place. Run by the Lehigh County Historical Society, it is now the place to dig into the bell's wartime journey and broader Lehigh Valley history.

HAMILTON STREET & THE HISTORIC COMMERCIAL CORE

Hamilton Street, roughly 5th to 10th Streets, downtown Allentown — For most of the 20th century this was the high-end shopping district of the entire Lehigh Valley. Look up to read the ornate late-19th and early-20th-century facades, many being restored as part of the ongoing downtown revival.

THE AMERICUS HOTEL

6th & Hamilton Streets, downtown Allentown — A 1927 grande dame restored and reopened in 2021, now operating as an Unscripted by Hyatt boutique hotel with 135 rooms and the Windows on 6th restaurant. Step into the lobby to appreciate the period detailing; it is very much open, not a relic.

ALLENTOWN ART MUSEUM

31 N 5th Street, downtown Allentown — Founded in 1934 by painter and critic Walter Emerson Baum, downtown's flagship art museum holds a strong collection from European old masters to American and contemporary works, an easy add a block off Hamilton Street.

MILLER SYMPHONY HALL

23 N 6th Street, downtown Allentown — Built in 1899 as the Lyric Theatre and a stop for vaudeville and Broadway, it has been home to the Allentown Symphony Orchestra since 1959, a genuine downtown historic theater worth pausing at.

CIVIC THEATRE OF ALLENTOWN

527 N 19th Street, West End / 19th Street Theatre District (about 2 miles from downtown) — A 1928 Art Deco movie-and-stage house added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2024, with restored pastel murals and an intact period interior. Note it sits in the West End, not on Hamilton Street, so plan it as a short drive or a separate leg of the tour.

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE & THE NIZ RENAISSANCE

Downtown core and the Lehigh Riverfront, Allentown — Former silk mills, foundries, and warehouses are being reborn as lofts, restaurants, and arts venues. The Neighborhood Improvement Zone (2009) catalyzed roughly \$1 billion in development, including the PPL Center arena that opened in 2014, home of the Lehigh Valley Phantoms.

TIPS & PLANNING

Wear comfortable shoes: the downtown stops (the church hiding-place site, Heritage Museum, Hamilton Street, the Americus, the Art Museum, and Miller Symphony Hall) cluster within an easy few-block walk between roughly 5th and 6th and Hamilton/Walnut. Confirm museum hours before you go, as several are closed Mondays. Free and metered parking is available in the NIZ garages off Hamilton Street. The Civic Theatre is in the West End about two miles away, so save it for a drive or a separate outing. The original Liberty Bell Museum is permanently closed, so do not route there expecting a museum; the artifacts are now at the Lehigh Valley Heritage Museum on Walnut Street.

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