

18th Century Architecture of Carlisle

Self Guided Walking Tour

Founded in 1751 as the county seat, Carlisle was the largest and wealthiest town in Cumberland County. There are numerous descriptions of 18th C. Carlisle because it was located on the Great Road to the west, and many of the travelers who passed through town wrote about it in their journals.

“The streets of the town are straight and there are many genteel houses...” wrote Johann David Schoepf in 1783.

“Almost all [the houses are] built of stone...” wrote M. St. Jean DeCrevecoeur in 1787. The houses, instead of adjoining one another, are separated either by an orchard or by a garden or a barn, often by all three.”

Abraham Steiner, on his way to survey lands in Ohio in 1789, described Carlisle as a “beautiful little town...The town has about 350 handsome and for the most part two-story houses, most of which are built of handsome blue limestone...The Court House is not large, but handsome, the prison small and the Market good. There are three churches...a college, and two English schools...”

While these descriptions of 18th C. Carlisle are very complimentary, they don't paint an accurate picture of the architecture of the town. While it was true that there were many “genteel” houses, and most of them were made of stone, the majority of houses were 1 ½ or 2-story log.

Because the oldest houses in many towns were often destroyed by fire or by residents who tore them down to build new houses in the latest architectural styles of the day, Carlisle is fortunate to have at least two dozen 18th C. houses remaining.

Seventeen buildings are included in this tour. You may start your tour at any point. Please note that this tour includes sidewalk views only.

1. | **First Presbyterian Church (NW corner of Square) Pennsylvania Historical Marker**

This is the oldest public building in Carlisle. In 1774, citizens met here to adopt resolutions condemning the closing of the port of Boston by the British. Many Revolutionary War officers were members of this congregation including General John Armstrong, General William Irvine who was captured at Trois Rivieres and later commanded Fort Pitt, Col. Robert Magaw,

defender of Fort Washington in New York, and Col. Ephraim Blaine, Commissary General of the Army. President George Washington attended service here on Oct. 5, 1794 before marching to western Pennsylvania to quell the Whiskey Rebellion.

The 1769 building contract for the church stipulated that the stonework should be massive at the base, building up to stones of a smaller size. The entrance to the church originally faced High Street but was altered in 1827 to face Hanover Street. The chapel and tower were added to the west end of the church in 1872, and in 1952, an educational-social annex was built.

2. | **Blaine House (4 N. Hanover St.) Wayside marker**

Col. Ephraim Blaine, Commissary General during the Revolutionary War, began construction on this house in 1794. Note the brick watertable running below the first floor windows and the stringcourses with their flat arches and keystones above the first and second story windows. The elaborate cornice and the large door with its delicate fanlight add to the beauty of the exterior. The house retains much of its original interior and is the best-preserved 18th C. house in Carlisle.

Rev. John Steel is thought to have built the stone portion in the rear of this house where his son-in-law kept a tavern. Rev. Steel was a native of Ireland and minister of the First Presbyterian Church from 1759 until his death in 1779. During the French and Indian War, Rev. Steel preached with a gun at his side and once led a company of riflemen against the Indians.

3. | **Steven Duncan House (4 E. High St.)**

Stephen Duncan, a merchant who came to Carlisle in the 1750s, built this stone house. Duncan was a Justice of the Peace, a member of the Pennsylvania Assembly, and a trustee of Dickinson College. His children married into the most prominent families in Carlisle. Duncan's son John was killed in a duel in 1793, and his widow became the second wife of Col. Ephraim Blaine. Occupants of the house in the 1990s claimed that it was haunted.

4. | **Thomas Duncan House (28-30 E. High St.)**

Judge Thomas Duncan, son of Stephen Duncan, built this house in the 1780s. Note the brick watertable running along the front of the house below the first floor windows and also the flat arched lintels with keystones above the windows. These are features found on houses built in the 1780s and 1790s. A pair of elegant mahogany doors and a paneled room end from the second floor were slated to be removed and discarded. They were salvaged and incorporated into the Stuart Reading Room at the Cumberland County Historical Society in 1997.

5. | Lyon House (119 E. High St.)

William Lyon, born in Ireland in 1729, built this house in 1788, according to notations in his business record. Lyon served as a First Lieutenant in the Pennsylvania Regiment during the French and Indian War, was a prosperous shopkeeper, and held several offices in county government. It is likely that he used the one-story portion of the house as his office.

6. | "Sign of the Turk" (137 E. High St.)

Every turn of the spade in the back yard of this property yields broken crockery, bottles and the refuse of more than 200 years of occupation. Tavernkeeper John Pollock built the house in the 1760s. The tavern was described in a 1773 newspaper advertisement as a 33 foot square stone house with a 25 foot square stone addition that housed a kitchen and bar room on the first floor and lodging rooms on the second floor. Both buildings are still standing. The tavern had its own brewery and a still in the cellar, and the stone-lined well can still be seen today.

This elegant tavern was favored by traveling dancing masters who gave lessons and held candlelight balls here in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

The house was updated c. 1870 when a mansard roof and a new cornice were added. Although the windows and doors have been altered, the original stone arches can still be seen at the window and cellar openings.

7. | Trent House (7 N. East St.)

This is one of the few surviving houses in Carlisle built before the Revolutionary War. Note the arched stone lintels over the windows on the first floor. This is a feature found on several houses built in Carlisle in the 1750s and 1760s. The original one-story attached kitchen had a second story added, as evidenced by the stone work. Original windows can be seen in the rear. The house may have been built by William Trent who mortgaged it in 1769 to his partner George Croghan, known as the "King of the Indian Traders." William Trent, son of the founder of Trenton, N.J., was an Indian trader, land speculator, soldier, and guide for General Forbes's army during the French and Indian War.

8. | Log House (157 Mulberry Alley) between East and Bedford Sts.

Although the location of all the doors and windows were altered in the 19th century, this 1 ½-story log house most likely dates to the Revolutionary War era. Note the half dovetailed construction at the corners of the house.

9. | Alexander House (60 N. East St.) SW corner of East and Louthier Sts.

John and Jacob Crever of York County, Pennsylvania, bought this property in 1774 and built a brewery and a malt house.

In 1801 James Craighead, the tavernkeeper at the time, ran the following advertisement in the newspaper: "To be sold or rented, that noted tavern and public stand formerly kept by Jacob Crever. There are on the premises a commodious Tavern House with a large yard and large and excellent stabling and sheds, a one-story brick building adjoining for a store, all in good repair, and a good and never failing well of water at the kitchen door." The brew house fronted on Louthier Street while the tavern fronted on East Street.

10. | Pollock House (229 E. Louthier St.)

This 18th C. stone house was owned by John Pollock, malster and tavernkeeper. In 1792 the property included the present two-story stone house with two kitchens, a brew house, and a back building of log. Except for the addition of a porch, there have been few alterations made to the house.

11. | McManus House "Sign of the Eagle & Harp" (131 N. East St.)

This classic 5-bay Georgian-style house with a center hall was built in 1803 by tavernkeeper Charles McManus. McManus also built and operated a distillery at the lower end of the lot adjoining the LeTort stream. This end of town was considered rough, and McManus's rowdy Irish tavern, named the "Sign of the Eagle and Harp," was the scene of many fights during his reign as tavernkeeper. McManus died in 1817, and the tavern and distillery were sold in 1824. One of the mantles from this house is in the Cumberland County Historical Society in Carlisle.

12. | "Sign of the Cross Keys" (176 E. Pomfret St.) SW corner Pomfret & Bedford Sts.

This large stone house was built between 1788-1798. Robert Taylor, a freemason, operated the "Sign of the Cross Keys" here from 1806-1822.

13. | Capt. William Armstrong House (109 E. Pomfret St.)

This 1 ½-story stone house, with later additions, is the oldest documented stone house still standing in Carlisle. It was built in the summer of 1759 by stone mason Stephen Foulk who came to Carlisle from Chester County, Pennsylvania. Records show that workmen were paid eight gallons of whiskey for digging the cellar. The 27' x 25' house was built for Capt. William Armstrong, brother of Col. John Armstrong of Carlisle, the "Hero of Kittanning."

14. | "Sign of the White Horse" (54 E. Pomfret St.)

Lewis Lewis, a surveyor and father of the infamous "Lewis the Robber," operated the "Sign of the White Horse" tavern in this house from 1784-1787. This 2 ½-story log house was built ca. 1780 and stuccoed ca. 1840. The house has corner fireplaces on the first and second floors and a cooking fireplace in the cellar.

