

## **Learning to Look at Architecture**

### **Slide Introduction to West Chester Walking Tour**

Title Slide. People come to museums like the Chester County Historical Society to learn about the past from objects and documents. But instead of visiting museum galleries you will be taking a walking tour, using the town of West Chester as an outdoor museum.

Before you begin your walk, let's learn a little about West Chester's past and talk about how to learn from an outdoor museum.

Slide 1. Let's start with a little background. Over 300 years ago, in 1681, the King of England, Charles II, gave the land that was to become Pennsylvania to William Penn. Penn divided this land grant into only three counties, one of which was Chester County. Penn gave each county a capital or county seat. Chester County's capital was Chester, situated right on the Delaware River. Penn's choice of Chester made sense. The first settlements were close to water because it was easier to travel by water than by the rough, rocky, dusty or muddy roads of the early days.

As people came to settle in Chester County, the land nearest Chester filled up first and then settlement spread west. By the year 1780, this is what a map of Chester County looked like. And there was a problem...People who lived in the northern or western parts of the county had a long way to come to the county seat when they

needed to pay their taxes, register the deeds for land that they purchased, vote for their representatives, or sue their neighbors in a court of law. Today we can drive across the entire county in less than an hour, but long ago the roads were so poor that it might take a farmer *days* to get from East Nantmeal to Chester. Chester County residents who lived far from Chester said “**It’s not fair**...we can’t afford to leave our farms or craft shops unattended for the better part of a week while we come to the county seat.”

They complained to their representatives in the State Assembly. What could the lawmakers do about the situation? In 1784 they chose a new site for a county seat, close to the center of the county—the tiny, sleepy village of Turk’s Head at the intersection of two major roads, one going north and south and the other going east and west. West Chester is a new name for Turk’s Head, as we shall see.

Slide 2. The village was called Turk’s Head because at the intersection of those two roads was an inn called the Turk’s Head Inn. This is the sign from that old inn.

Many of the people in and around Turk’s Head saw the coming of the county seat as a great business opportunity—lawyers could set up offices, new inns could be built, shops could cater to the needs of people coming to town to do their business at the courthouse, and banks could be built to keep money safe for the business community. But the people of Chester were bitterly opposed to the move. The Chester lawyers would lose their clients if the courthouse were no longer there. Who would stay in

Chester's inns, eat in the restaurants, drink at the taverns, shop in the shops if people no longer had to come to Chester to come to court?

Slide 3. In 1785 a group from Chester marched on Turk's Head with a cannon, threatening to bombard the new courthouse that was being built. We almost had a battle right in West Chester, but somehow law abiding citizens prevailed and the "Battle of Turk's Head" was called off.

By 1786, the new courthouse was completed and the sleepy village of Turk's Head would never be the same. The town was officially renamed West Chester in 1788 and it has been the county seat of Chester County for over two hundred years.

Slide 4. The people of Chester never really got over losing the county seat. In 1789 they decided to form their own county and Delaware County detached itself from Chester County. The yellow line shows the boundary between the two. Chester became the county seat there.

Slide 5. West Chester grew rapidly and by 1840 it was a thriving city. In this painting taken from an old woodcut, you can see the Turk's Head Inn, the courthouse and the many business that crowded the center of West Chester on either side of dirt roads with cobblestone crosswalks.

Slide 6. The center of West Chester where the courthouse was first built is still the center of West Chester today. Clearly it no longer looks the same. And yet an old courthouse is right there in the midst of modern streetlights, cars, and flags. As you walk through West Chester, you will see old West Chester mixed in with new West Chester. Your job will be to look for clues to the past that are hidden in a modern city. See if you can remember these SIX CLUES to finding the old in the new, the presence of history in West Chester today.

Slide 7. CLUE #1 is datestones.

Slide 8. Some old buildings, like Horticultural Hall, which is now part of our History Center at Chester County Historical Society, wear the date when they were built “front and center.” You will learn about an unusual building material used for Horticultural Hall and a famous architect who designed the building.

Slide 9. Some datestones are found in unusual places—like on the downspout of a gutter.

Slide 10. Some buildings have more than one datestone. Usually when this occurs, the earlier date is the date that the company began. In this case it is the date that the

first fire company was formed in West Chester. In 1799, the fire company had a different building. The later date is the date when this particular building was built.

Slide 11. CLUE #2 is historical markers or monuments.

Slide 12. The state of Pennsylvania put up this marker so people would know a little about the beginnings of Chester County. Markers and monuments show us the buildings or places that the community considers important.

Slide 13. This marker was erected by the West Chester Area Education Association to mark the spot of the first schoolhouse in West Chester. It is found near the ground in a planted area.

Slide 14. This painting by Barclay Rubincam shows the one-room log schoolhouse at the intersection of two roads. In Rubincam's painting, the schoolchildren have been displaced by Revolutionary War soldiers who used the building as a hospital shortly after the Battle of Brandywine in 1777. When you find the historical marker on your walking tour you will see what that intersection looks like today. You may be surprised!

Slide 15. A county seat like West Chester sometimes has statues or monuments.

This one is dedicated to the soldiers and sailors from Chester County who fought in the Civil War and is called “Old Glory.” Do you know what “Old Glory” means?

[pause] It is a name for the United States’ flag.

Slide 16. CLUE #3 is leftovers.

Slide 17. Leftovers are objects that once served a purpose, but no longer serve that same purpose. They remind us of an earlier time in our history. This fountain is one of West Chester’s most famous leftovers. It stands at the center of town and once provided drinking water for thirsty people, horses and dogs! When you see it today, you’ll see that it is no longer a fountain, but a leftover of an earlier time.

Slide 18. Staying with the leftover clue, long ago, West Chester businessmen erected shed roofs over the sidewalks in front of their stores to shelter the shoppers who strolled the streets of West Chester to do their weekly shopping. Today, most of us do our shopping in large grocery stores or suburban shopping malls. The few remaining shed roofs of West Chester are leftovers that remind us of a time when people came into town to do their shopping.

Slide 19. This photograph, taken long ago, shows how shed roofs used to line the streets.

Slide 20. Before we go on to CLUE #4, let's review the first three clues to finding the old among the new.

**CLUE #1—datestones**

**CLUE #2—markers and monuments**

**CLUE #3—leftovers**

Slide 21. Clue #4 is “look up.”

Slide 22. As time passes, many old buildings are modernized to meet the needs of today's people. Often the changes are made only on the ground level. The second or third stories of the buildings give us clues to what the building originally looked like or its original purpose.

If we walked by this building with our eyes straight ahead, all we could see is a garage. But if we look up, we see something rather curious—a second story door, leading to the open air. Can you think of a building that you might see out in the country that has a door on the second story? (*Pause*) Barns store hay on the second level and hay is hoisted in or pitched out the second level doorway. In a city like West Chester, there would be no barns, but long ago, people who came to town had to find a place for their horses to stay while people stayed in hotels. The stable or carriage house stored hay on the second level and animals on the first. By looking up

we are reminded of a time before the automobile when people rode horses and carriages into town.

Slide 22. CLUE #5 is to look for obvious changes.

Slide 23. Sometimes when we look at a building, we see a part that doesn't seem to "go" with the rest of the building. The building has been changed. In this picture, the large garage door seems out of place; it doesn't seem to go with the rest of the building. Let's take a look at an old photograph of this building to see what it originally looked like...

Slide 24. Originally there were two small, arched doors. The large garage door seems more practical for a firehouse, but the original smaller arched doors give us a clue to the past. Let's look at the kind of fire engine that was housed in the firehouse long ago.

Slide 25. The small, hand pumper would fit nicely through the smaller doors; a modern fire engine requires a much larger opening.

Slide 26. CLUE #6 is style.



Slide 27. People who design buildings use materials, shapes and patterns that are popular at the time or that express certain ideas. Look at the buildings in the next three slides. If you didn't know these buildings are all in West Chester, where might you think you would find them?

Slide 28, 29 (No comment by narrator; **leave each up for 5 seconds**)

Slide 30 (*After a slight pause*) These buildings copy the style of buildings that were built in ancient Greece thousands of years ago. In the early years of the United States, builders borrowed the classical style from ancient Greece because they thought it was beautiful and because it reminded them that the form of government in the United States is based on the very first democracy in ancient Greece. The number of classical buildings in West Chester remind us that people who live here are proud of the freedom that we have under a democratic form of government.

Slide 31. We have looked at six clues to finding the old among the new in West Chester:

**CLUE #1—datestones**

**CLUE #2—markers and monuments**

**CLUE #3—leftovers**

**CLUE #4—look up**

**CLUE #5—obvious changes**

**CLUE #6—style**

When you go out on the streets you will be trying to match one or more clues to each building you look at. Let's see what clues you would use to learn about the next six pictures.

Slide 32. (*Pause*) This leftover is a bootscraper. It reminds us of the time when the streets of West Chester were not paved as they are today. People who walked on dusty or muddy streets would scrape the dirt off their boots before entering a house as a courtesy to their host or hostess.

Slide 33. (*After a pause*) ...a building with many obvious changes. It was the Cabinet of Sciences, the first museum in West Chester. Today the building has been changed to meet other needs—our need for pizza!?

Slide 34. An old drawing of the Cabinet of Sciences shows the building before its many changes.

Slide 35. (*After a pause*) ...the classical style reminds us of our democratic form of government, copied from ancient Greece.

Slide 36. (*After a pause*) ...the datestone is front and center.

Slide 37. (*After a pause*) ...an old house is completely wrapped up in modern shops. Only by looking up do you see the evidence of the old.

Slide 38. (*After a pause*) ...the historic marker reminds us that this community values the old that has survived among the new.

## **Walking Tour Rules**

Before we begin our walk, let me remind you of a few “rules of the road.”

- 1. Stay with your group, behind the museum leader and in front of an adult “sweeper” from your school.**
- 2. Do not step into the street.**
- 3. Cross streets at corners, with signal from your museum leader. Also, look both ways yourself.**
- 4. Respect private and public property. Do not climb on or swing from anything, block doorways, ring doorbells, etc.**
- 5. Adults—*You* are critical to the success of our walking tours. We hope that each of you will take an active role in the tour by watching out for the safety of students in your group, modeling the behavior of attentive learners, and encouraging students to stay focused on the morning’s lesson.**