

Map of the Historic Carrell Tract

A Brief History of Merchantville

Merchantville was primarily farm land until about 1851. Rumors of the coming of the railroad were the impetus for land acquisition. Although the town was originally part of Stockton Township, the citizens of Merchantville petitioned the state to become an incorporated Borough. This became effective May 18, 1874.

The second growth occurred in the automobile age when feasibility studies for the building of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge were begun in 1914. After the First World War, lots were bought and development began anew. When the bridge opened in 1926, new streets on the south side of Maple Avenue were cut through, individual homes built and the Borough gradually developed to near its present population.

In addition to improved means of transportation, location was important in the growth of Merchantville. Maple Avenue was on a ridge 80 feet high, and churches and shopping were convenient.

In 1899, Francis F. Eastlack, local author, described the Borough. "Here you have an already established town, healthy, pure air, well lighted, well governed with every convenience befitting a wide awake, prosperous town, and where the people are hospitable and will gladly welcome all who seriously think of locating with them." And so it remains today.

A Walking tour of The Carrell Tract Historic District

1. The Train Station

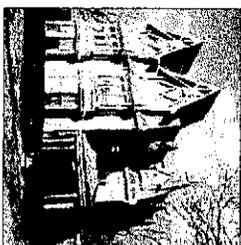
North Centre Street & East Chestnut Avenue
circa 1881

The development of Victorian Merchantville can be linked to the ease of transportation allowed by the railways. Philadelphians were able to live in a pleasant new development while commuting easily to the city for their business. The 1 1/2 story train station was the center of life in the newly developed town. Its inviting porch provided protected areas for awaiting trains while passing the time of day. The ticket office was located in the central area with freight and passenger waiting rooms on either side. At one time the train master lived on the second floor with his family. The present use of the building as office space is a good example of adaptive reuse of a historical building with sensitive treatment of the exterior to maintain the Victorian character. Note the carved griffins in the tympanum, a symbol of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

2. The Ingersoll House

1 East Chestnut Avenue
circa 1888

This Queen Anne house is attributed to architect Henry J. Crump. Look up to be enchanted by the romantic incised vergeboard decorating the dormer gables. The decoration is enhanced by the use of color applied by the current owners. The crowning glory of the front porch is the repeat of this pattern above the porch steps. Such fanciful porches invite all to feel the summer breezes in their shade. The entry way additions include lovely stained glass from an historic church which completes the welcome presented to the visitor.



3. The Centennial House

17-19 East Chestnut Avenue
circa 1877

An impressive and massive double home in the Stick Style this is an excellent example of the genre. It was believed that the house was first built for the Centennial Exposition held in Philadelphia in 1876 but the owner, was vice-counsel to Great Britain and was known to have operated a hotel on the outskirts of the fairgrounds. The house may have been built partially from materials salvaged from buildings at the fair. Don't miss the Mansard towers with patterned grey and red slate. Also note the diagonal wood siding. The house is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

4. The Bayliss Carriage House

20 Gilmore Avenue
circa 1873

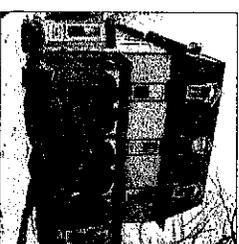
This home was built as the residence of the carriage master on the estate of Joseph Bayliss whose beautifully restored Second Empire Home can be seen at 40 East Walnut Avenue. The diminutive carriage house is built in the Italianate style which adds an elegance to the present streetscape. At one time the Bayliss estate included much of the east half of East Walnut Avenue bordered by Gilmore. Many fruit trees and shrubs graced the gardens. Look to the rear of 22 Gilmore Avenue next door for a peek at the carriage barn still standing. The current owners have colored their Painted Lady to show her charms.

5. 100 East Walnut Avenue

circa 1889

Attributed to architect Isaac Pursell this large home combines the picturesque Queen Anne and Stick Styles. The steep sloping red slate roof shelters a graceful home with diamond cut shingles above a stone first floor. The second floor balcony provides a quiet place to watch the world go by. Note the decorative windows to the left of the entry added by the current owners. Once again the restorers are working to use color to highlight the Victorian detail of their home.

Also note the Isaac Pursell House 101 East Walnut Avenue An excellent example of Old English and Queen Anne which may have been described in a then popular magazine Godey's Lady's Book.



6. The Sarah Jesson House

30 East Walnut Avenue
circa 1883

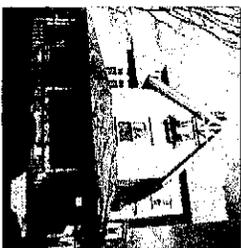
Built in The Second Empire manner this lovely home has been returned to its former elegance. The clapboard has been freed of its aluminum covering. The colors which highlight this home's formality were chosen from similar styles in Victorian Cape May. The Mansard grey slate roof is decorated with flowers and fancifully trimmed windows enriched with color. Gingerbread brackets on the porch columns are reminders that much Victorian architecture is just to please the eye.

7. The Furber House

25 East Walnut Avenue
circa 1869

This Classical Revival home is somewhat different from most Victorian homes in the Carrell Tract. Built in 1869 it was the first home of the building boom begun by Senator Carrell. It has been described as an urban townhouse which is somewhat unusual for a small developing commuter suburb of Philadelphia. The classical lines of the porch are enhanced with Ionic columns. Inside this formal home can be found a staircase that has been covered by museums and a paneled dining room that would be at home in any English manor house.





8. The Scudder House
15 East Walnut Avenue
circa 1899

At the great height of four stories, this is the tallest home in Merchantville. The skyline of Philadelphia is visible from the top windows. Built in the Queen Anne style, with the look of a farm house, this clapboard and fish scale shingle home is now surrounded by lovely gardens that speak to us of the gentle summers of the past. The spindle work frieze and rail of the porch add sunshine and shadow to the setting.

9. 15 West Walnut Avenue
circa 1900

Peeping out from behind old pine trees is a Queen Anne home built of softly colored stone on the first floor with scalloped shingles and stick work above on the gables. The later date of construction is evidenced by the Colonial Revival entrance way. The Centennial celebrations of 1876 had sparked a new interest in all things colonial. Look for the simple geometric glass that graces the central second floor window. The more graceful lines of earlier glass was, by 1900, past its height of popularity.

Also note the Summer Cottages at 23-27, as you pass down West Walnut Avenue. It is thought that these homes were originally used as summer retreats from the heat of the city. Although somewhat altered from their original appearance, they still reflect their Victorian flavor.

10. The Godfrey House
37 West Walnut Avenue
circa 1891

In the Queen Anne style this home is somewhat smaller than others but contains all of the elements that make the style so characteristic of the "Gay Nineties". The sunburst motif in the entry gable seems to complement the owners' choice of pale yellow for the clapboards. The iron fence surrounding the front of the property with it swinging gate guides one toward the newly restored screen doors with their curly gingerbread trim.

Also note the Webster House at 41 West Walnut Avenue, circa 1893. In the Queen Anne style, it boasts the classic turret of this style. The stained glass transom over the double front doors is one of several in the home.

Also note 46 West Walnut Avenue, circa 1890. A large and imposing home this property was once the home of Jane Erye Fryer, the author of the Mary Frances series of children's books. The "Garden Book" from the series shows beautiful drawings of the gardens full of old fashioned flowers.



11. The Bungalows of Leslie Avenue
circa 1920

In the second decade of this century smaller houses were built along the newly cut Leslie Avenue on land previously part of earlier Victorian properties. The homes constructed are examples of the Craftsman style bungalows of this period. No. 126 is a fine example of the two story three bay bungalow with stucco over masonry and heavy stone porch columns. Across Leslie Avenue, at No. 129 is the frame wood shingled version. The interiors of these homes have chestnut and oak woodwork and exposed beams.

Also note 58 West Walnut Avenue. This is a very interesting Tudor Revival/Craftsman house with half timbering in the front gable. Built in 1915 it demonstrates a transition between styles.



12. The Sutor House
44 West Cedar Avenue
circa 1905

An American Foursquare House with clapboard first floor and cedar shake above, this typically American building was very popular after the turn of the century. Although much simpler in ornamentation than its fancy predecessors, it has a solidity and dignity of its own. Again the use of lovely woods is evident in the interiors.

13. The Cunningham House
23 West Cedar Avenue
circa 1890

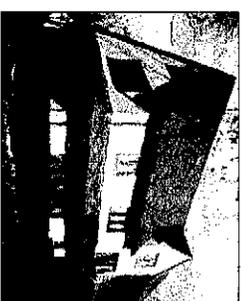


This Queen Anne home is a superb example of restoration using modern materials and a sensitivity to period detail.

Recently clad with restoration siding including replicated scalloped shingles in appropriate colors, it has returned to its Victorian appearance and again adds to the ambience of the street. Notice the lattice addition to the front porch providing privacy while whimsically adding charm.

14. The Wilson House
213 North Centre Street
circa 1896

Also in the Queen Anne style, this home has been restored to its old fashioned appearance with the use of color and the return of the second story balcony. Of interest is the carriage house seen at the rear with its board and batten siding and second floor loft door. It is easy to picture a noisy family of children being dropped off before the carriage was tucked away in the carriage house. What fun hide and seek must have been in such a place!



15. The "Nethusa" Residence
of Samuel H. Rous,
Vice President of Victor Victrola Company
25 East Cedar Avenue
circa 1913

Tudor Revival in style, the eye is drawn immediately to the single and grouped leaded glass casement windows which call to mind a Swiss chalet. This home was built for the astronomical sum of \$37,000. Mr. Rous, who was in charge of cabinetry for Victor Victrola, had the walls of his new home lined with the finest of woods. The dining room is paneled in black walnut. The built-in table and benches in the living room are of the same beautiful wood. The home had all the amenities, including bells to call the servants, a log elevator, four fireplaces and a built-in vacuum cleaner.

Special thanks to the following resources for the information included in this Tour Guide:

- *Merchantville New Jersey Historic/Architectural Resource Survey, October 1992; Carol A. Benson.*
- *History of Merchantville, Camden County, New Jersey, 1899; Francis Eastlack.*
- *The Merchantville Centennial Cookbook, 1974.*

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MERCHANTVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1 West Maple Avenue • Merchantville • New Jersey 08109

The Merchantville Historical Society Presents
A Walking Tour
of the
CATTELL TRACT

A Nationally Registered Historic District



Alexander G. Cattell

A Brief History of the Cattell Tract

Alexander G. Cattell, United States Senator, commission merchant, and organizer of the Corn Exchange National Bank of Philadelphia, was the first developer of Merchantville. By 1854, he along with the "founding fathers", real estate speculators, had acquired land which was to become the Borough of Merchantville. Cattell and his brother, Elijah G., eventually acquired 79 acres or one fifth of Merchantville's total area.

Nor coincidentally, the first railroad was chartered for construction and operation between Pemberton and Mount Holly the same year. However, it took until 1866 for the Camden and Burlington Railroad to break ground. The Catells and other land owners donated much of the land needed.

Between 1868 and the mid 1870's several Cattell lots were sold for \$400-500. The first home, the Fuber House, at 25 East Walnut Avenue was built in 1869. Contributing to the first building boom were the formation of the Cottage Building and Loan Association, magazines that promoted suburban living, and the opening of a summer boarding house.

By 1910 the Cattell Tract was substantially developed, its predominant architecture being Victorian. Today the majority of structures exhibit a high degree of architectural integrity and are in excellent condition.