

Philadelphia: A Treasure Trove of Historic Sites

BY GARY STERNBERG, Senior Member



Philadelphia, often considered the birthplace of the United States of America, is a treasure trove of historic sites. There's Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, of course—and lots more. Experiencing historic Philadelphia should be particularly attractive to attendees of the 2008 STC Technical Communication Summit for a couple of reasons: (1) most of the attractions are within easy walking distance of the convention center, and (2) while there are plenty of tours that you or perhaps your spouse and children can check out during the day, many of the attractions can also be enjoyed during the evening hours. In fact, taking a leisurely stroll through the cobblestone streets of “Old City” Philadelphia is a great way to experience the city.

Key Historic Sites

If you haven't been there yet, visiting **Independence Hall** is a must. This is where the founding fathers signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776, as well as the U.S. Constitution in 1787. Free guided tours of the assembly room are offered during the day, but just view-

ing the building from the outside can be quite moving. While the indoor tours are free, you need to get a timed ticket in advance at the Independence Visitor Center.

Just a few steps away is a special building housing the **Liberty Bell**, which summoned the colonists to hear the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence. Also nearby is the **Graff House**, where you can tour the room in which Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence during the Second Continental Congress. You can also visit **Carpenter's Hall**, where delegates met in 1774 for the first Continental Congress, and **Congress Hall**, where the nation's first legislature met and John Adams was inaugurated president in 1797. The recently constructed **Constitution Center** houses many interactive and multimedia exhibits.

To get a great feel for colonial America, stroll down **Elfreth's Alley**, the nation's oldest continuously inhabited street—some homes have been occupied for about 300 years. Two of the homes now serve as museums and are open to the public.

Several other sites give you a peek into Philadelphia's history. The **Betsy Ross House** was the home of America's best-known flagmaker, credited with making America's first flag. The **Dolley**

Todd (Madison) House is where Dolley and her first husband, John Todd, shared a middle-class home prior to her later marriage to America's fourth president, James Madison. The **Powell House** and **Physick House** are mansions that showcase how the wealthy lived during colonial times.

Interested in Ben Franklin—probably Philadelphia's most famous citizen? There's quite a bit to see. **Franklin's Print Shop** is a re-creation of an eighteenth-century print shop on the site where Franklin published *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. A few blocks away is the **Christ Church Burial Ground**, where Franklin is buried. Visitors often leave a penny here—a nod to Franklin's motto “a penny saved is a penny earned.” **Christ Church** itself (built in 1724) is where founding fathers Franklin and George Washington worshipped.

After the Colonial Era

While Philadelphia is known for its role in the early days of the United States, many other interesting historic sites date to the postindependence period.

The **Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site** is where the famous author lived from 1843 to 1844. During that time, he penned “The Black Cat” and published “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Fall of





the House of Usher.” Visitors can tour the stark rooms and cellar of his three-story home.

America’s first mint opened in Philadelphia in 1792, only two blocks from where the current **U.S. Mint** was constructed in 1969. At least half of the nation’s coins are still made here, and a popular tour is offered.

Right across the street from the convention center is the **Reading Terminal Market**, where more than a hundred merchants—including Amish farmers—sell their wares. Opened in 1893, the market is a gastronomic bazaar with dozens of eateries (but no national chains!), and is a great place to stop for lunch during the conference.

Near the historic district is the **Eastern State Penitentiary**, opened in 1829. Its massive, forbidding walls still stand, even though it has not been used as a prison since 1971. This Quaker-inspired penitentiary was designed not simply to punish, but to move criminals toward spiritual reflection and change through penance. A fascinating tour is offered at this landmark facility, where mob boss Al Capone and bank robber Willie Sutton did time.

Tours Abound


While a do-it-yourself walking tour can be very rewarding, dozens of organized tours are available. In addition to the (usually free) tours inside the historic sites such as Independence Hall, there are guided walking tours, open-

bus tours, horse-drawn carriage rides, trolley tours, “duck” tours via amphibious craft, ghost tours, and even drinking tours!

Particularly popular with children is the **Lights of Liberty** tour. At dusk, you’ll don headsets and follow cos-

tumed guides through the historic district, where hand-painted images are projected onto such buildings as Independence Hall while you listen to a guided tour. Of a more adult nature are the **Tippler’s Tours**, inviting you to sample traditional drinks at colonial and modern-day watering holes as your guide shares stories of tavern life in colonial Philadelphia.

For More Information

In short, a wealth of American history abounds in Philadelphia, and it will be a moving and exciting experience for anyone who comes to STC’s 2008 Technical Communication Summit. The Philadelphia Metro chapter will give you maps and lots of advice when you arrive for the conference. For more in advance, there are a number of useful Web sites, including www.gophila.com (click on the “Historical Philadelphia” link) and www.independencevisitorcenter.com. 



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