

## A. REGIONAL HISTORY

The Allegheny River is likely named for the Allegawes, the native people who lived along its shores before the arrival of the Delaware tribes. Later, the Seneca tribe and the French trappers viewed the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers as one river, which they referred to as “the beautiful river” or “fair waters.”

Despite the presence of these people, the area was not settled. It was home to abundant wildlife, including species that no longer inhabit Pennsylvania such as wolves, panthers, and buffalo. It was not until after the revolutionary war when much of the land in the Allegheny Valley was set aside as “depreciation lands” for soldiers that real settlement began. Development in the area came slowly, however, with the establishment of stations, small towns that popped up along the Allegheny River. Settlement was finally sparked by the establishment of the Pennsylvania Canal in the 1820s, which followed the Kiskiminetas River, to the Allegheny River to Pittsburgh. By the mid 1850s, the railroad was becoming established on the east bank of the Allegheny River, and soon surpassed the canal as the primary means of transportation. More and more people were now settling in the area, especially because of the vast supply of minerals and resources such as salt, coal, oil, and gas.

But what truly has defined the region are the variety of cultures and ethnicities that make the valley such an interesting place to live and visit. The building of the canal and railroads, and especially the coal mining caused the influx of Europeans to the area, each group recruited for specific jobs. Those European cultures have survived in clusters throughout the corridor.

Local historical societies are excellent resources for learning more about the history of the region: Alle-Kiski Valley Historical Society (Tarentum), Kittanning Historical Society, and East Brady Historical Society.

## B. LOCAL MUNICIPAL HISTORIES

Each municipality in this corridor has its own distinct history. Their stories are summarized in the Appendix at the end of the chapter. Other major historical facts about the corridor:

- 1) 1849, Natrona – Samuel Kier refined oil to a usable substance
- 2) 1883, Creighton – PPG (Pittsburgh Plate Glass) established
- 3) 1885, New Kensington – Charles Martin Hall invented a process to extract aluminum, thus establishing ALCOA (Aluminum Company of America)
- 4) 1907, Springdale – Birth of noted environmentalist Rachel Carson

## C. UNIQUE CULTURAL FEATURES

### 1. River Towns - Heritage

The Alle-Kiski river towns are remembered for their industrial heritage – centers for making glass, aluminum, and steel. As such, the river valley lies within the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area – a 3,000 square mile region in seven counties (Allegheny, Armstrong, Westmoreland, Washington, Beaver, Fayette, and Greene) that was created by Congress in 1996 to preserve, interpret, and manage the historical, cultural, and natural resources related to the Steel Industry. The Steel Industry Heritage Corporation (SIHC), a non-profit organization that coordinates the Heritage Area, offers a variety of interpretive programs. Information can be found on their website: [www.riversofsteel.com](http://www.riversofsteel.com).

The PA Heritage Parks Program, administered by the SIHC, has awarded grants to several river-related projects.<sup>1</sup> They are:

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Leber, SIHC, personal communication, December 2003

- Nine dedicated canoe access sites from Freeport to Pittsburgh (awarded to Friends of the Riverfront);
- The design and development of river landing heritage kiosks throughout the area;
- Allegheny River Water Trail heritage signs along the Allegheny River from the Kiskiminetas River to the Ohio River (awarded to Friends of the Riverfront); and
- Connecting Wood St. to boat access ramp for a canoe/kayak access; it will involve the purchase of racks, signs, and kiosks (awarded to Tarentum Borough).

## 2. Local Points of Interest



*Historic Coke Ovens along Armstrong Trail*



*Historical Interpretive Kiosk along the river in Emlenton*

- The A-K Valley Heritage Museum in Tarentum is a resource library and museum of artifacts of local significance. In particular, the museum houses glass artifacts from PPG's first plant in Tarentum and aluminum artifacts from the first aluminum plant in New Kensington. The museum itself is located in an art deco building from 1931 that was originally an American Legion Post. Blue cobalt glass and art glass donated by PPG, as well as art deco aluminum from Alcoa, was used to decorate the interior. The building also is decorated with murals depicting life during World War II. These murals need to be restored when funding or donated services are available. More information can be found at [www.akvhs.org](http://www.akvhs.org).
- Murphy's Bottom – Native American artifacts, Native American burial ground topped by settlers cemetery – west bank next to Donley Island
- Coke ovens – seen from trail on east bank across from Clinton
- Trilobite fossils – along riverbanks in Kittanning
- Glacial remnants – Armstrong County
- Stone used for Armstrong County Court House – can see areas where stone was taken
- Coal Tipple – coal loading tower along trail on east bank across from Watersonville
- Train Turntable – near trail entrance in Phillipston
- Petroglyphs – Rattle Snake Riffle, Parker, Emlenton
- Monticello Furnace – above Cowanshannock
- Carnegie Estate cove – across from Freeport
- Brick plant – along Butler-Freeport Trail one mile from Freeport
- Mickey's Mill in Freeport, along with many mills along Buffalo Creek
- Civil War cemeteries – Hillville
- French & Indian War battle site at Kittanning
- Rachel Carson Homestead – Springdale Borough
- Sarah Furnace Cave
- First US Golf Course – Foxburg

- Fort Crawford (now New Kensington)
- Bread oven – near Catfish Run
- Ironworks at Brady's Bend

## D. THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES<sup>2</sup>

The PA Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) manages the National Register of Historic Places for Pennsylvania. The program was established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Properties listed in the Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. National Register properties are distinguished by having been documented and evaluated according to uniform standards. These criteria recognize the accomplishments of all people who have contributed to the history and heritage of the United States and are designed to help state and local governments, federal agencies, and others identify significant historic and archeological properties worthy of preservation and of consideration in planning and development decisions. Listing in the National Register, however, does not interfere with a private property owner's right to alter, manage, or dispose of property. It often changes the way communities perceive their historic resources and gives credibility to efforts to preserve these resources as irreplaceable parts of the communities.

Listing in the National Register contributes to preserving historic properties in a number of ways:

- Recognition that a property is of significance to the nation, the state, or the community.
- Consideration in the planning for federal or federally assisted projects.
- Eligibility for federal tax benefits.
- Qualification for federal assistance for historic preservation, when funds are available.

The list of historic places in and near the corridor can be found at the end of this chapter.

## E. THE HISTORICAL MARKER PROGRAM<sup>3</sup>

The historical marker program, established in 1946, is one of PHMC's oldest and most popular programs. The blue and gold markers located throughout the state highlight people, places, and events significant in state and national history. Presently, nearly 1,800 markers recognize Pennsylvania's history - from William Penn's country home, to the bloody Homestead Strike of 1892, to the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the nation's first long-distance superhighway.

See the list of historical markers at the end of this chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> Supported and published by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) [www.phmc.state.pa.us](http://www.phmc.state.pa.us) Summary taken from PHMC.

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