

Take time out of the "hustle and bustle" of your everyday life and find time to experience our heritage and past. Learn how specialty wagons were manufactured, experience what life was like in the 1800's for the canal people, and venture onto the longest single-spanned wooden covered bridge in Pennsylvania.

The Berks County Heritage Center is an historical interpretive complex commemorating important eras of our cultural history.

It's a place for young and old alike—learning is made easy through the use of senses and your own imagination.

Here at the Berks County Heritage Center time is of no importance...it gives us moments to learn about our ancestors and chances to remember the "simple life" without the care and worries of today...it's a time for reflecting and learning.



THE GRUBER WAGON WORKS

A National Historic Landmark, the Gruber Wagon Works survives as one of the most complete examples of integrated rural manufacturing in the nation. Erected in 1882 by Franklin H. Gruber, the wagon works evolved from a single craftsman shop having a variety of specialized hand tools, into a family operated business that employed up to twenty men who utilized mass production methods.

Hayflats, box wagons, wheelbarrows, work sleds and specialty wagons were designed to customers' specifications. Following WWI, the popularity of the automobile brought about a decline in the wagon building trade, so the Grubers began to manufacture wooden truck bodies and socket wrenches for use on the Model A Ford.

Frank P. Gruber assumed the operation of the shop in 1935 when his uncles retired. He continued to build wagons on a small scale and operate the facility as a repair shop until 1972.

In 1970, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Philadelphia District, discovered the property while developing the area for the Blue Marsh Lake Project. When the Corps purchased the wagon works it was empty of activity; a place where time had stood still; where the workers had just walked off the job, planning to return tomorrow, but tomorrow never came. Realizing it was a rare find, they had the building and its contents listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

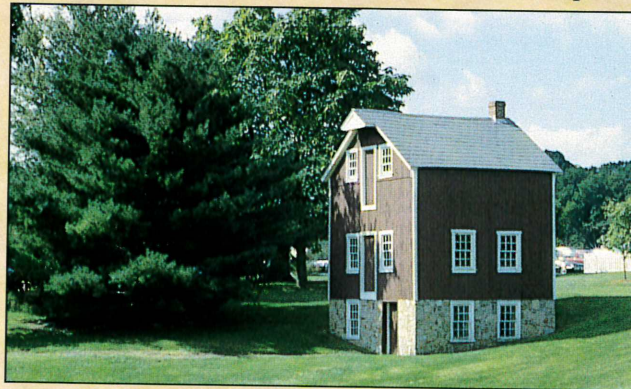
After two Acts of Congress and years of preparation, the Gruber Wagon Works was delicately separated into four sections and moved to the Berks County Heritage Center in the late fall of 1976. The five-mile trip from the original location in Mt. Pleasant took six hours to complete. Two days before Christmas, the final sections were put in place and the task of restoration began.

The building has been restored to its peak era of production—1915, when the Grubers were producing about 100 wagons per year—and all of the 19,000 tools and pieces of equipment have been placed in their original locations.

The Gruber Wagon Works—a living example of the golden age of the American Craftsman—has been preserved so that visitors and historians can more fully understand and appreciate this small part of our nation's heritage.

MELCHER'S GRIST MILL

The mill, built about 1888 for Nicklos Melcher, represents an extremely rare and complete example of

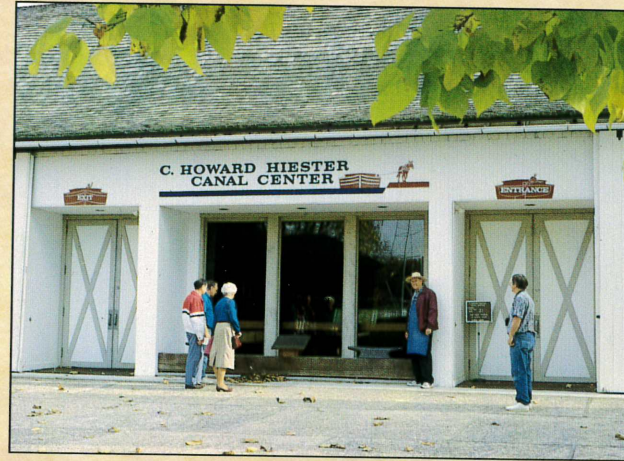


a water powered, multipurpose farm mill. Relocated here from Bally, PA, this family owned mill operated through the use of millstones for grinding cornmeal and grains into feed for animals.

Unlike most milling facilities which were commercial enterprises, this mill served only the needs of the farm on which it was located.

THE C. HOWARD HIESTER CANAL CENTER

The Hiester Canal Center has been designed to present a coherent story of the canal transportation era and specifically the important contributions the



Union Canal and Schuylkill Navigation System made to the history and growth of Berks County.

C. Howard Hiester was a preeminent authority on Berks County's canals. His interest in canals came naturally, as his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and many of his uncles were all associated with the canals of Berks County. As a youngster, Howard spent a considerable amount of time at his grandfather's boatyard, which was located at Hiester's Landing at 6th and Canal Streets in Reading.

Around 1927, the Schuylkill Navigation Company closed its longtime central headquarters in Reading. Virtually everything in the building was thrown into the canal bed for fill. This included tools, patterns, photos, ledgers, and a vast amount of correspondence. It was at this time that Howard realized what an accumulated wealth of memorabilia was about to be lost. He took it upon himself to save as many of the artifacts and representative items as possible from the section of

the Schuylkill Navigation system between Reading and Philadelphia. The end result was that Mr. Hiester had acquired the largest private collection of 19th century canal memorabilia in America—over 1400 items. Many of these artifacts remain as absolutely one of a kind items and most remarkable is that he knew all about each item within his collection.

In 1976, Mr. Hiester donated his collection to the County of Berks to ensure that the artifacts remained together and were properly displayed. The Canal Center was opened to the public in 1986.

As a result of the efforts of one man, we have the opportunity to view the most extensive private canal collection of a bygone era.



WERTZ'S (Red) BRIDGE

From an age long ago, Wertz's Red Bridge stands as the longest single-spanned covered bridge in Pennsylvania. Stretching 218 feet across the Tulpehocken Creek, it serves as a link between Bern and Spring Townships. It was erected in 1867 using the Burr Arch-Truss construction design. In 1979, the bridge was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Wertz's Bridge represents one of only five remaining covered bridges in Berks County.

THE SALAD AND HERB GARDEN

The garden displays many types of plants and gardening skills typically brought to America by early European settlers.

THE DEPPEN CEMETERY



The Deppen Cemetery, also known as the Catholic Cemetery, was relocated from its original location near Mount Pleasant to prevent its inundation by the Blue Marsh Lake project. Buried here are Irish workers who died of "Swamp Fever" while building the Union Canal, in addition to local residents from Obold, which is presently known as Mount Pleasant.

THE REESER FARM HOUSE



The Berks County Heritage Center is the former Reeser home and farm. It survives as a witness to the agricultural lifestyle of early Berks County.

From its purchase in 1774 by Abraham Reeser, and through various ownerships, the land was actively farmed until 1978 when the 50 acre farm was acquired by Berks County for development of the Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park System.

The home, barn and several outbuildings remain to reflect the changes brought about by necessity and agricultural modernization.

Today, the Reeser Farm House serves as the main office and information center for the Berks County Heritage Center.

THE UNION CANAL BICYCLE AND WALKING TRAIL



The Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail, designated as a National Recreation Trail, winds along the Tulpehocken Creek, tracing the former canal towpath from the Reading city limits northward toward the Blue Marsh property at Reber's Bridge. The 4.5 mile trail is used for biking, running and other outdoor activities as well as a means for visiting the recreational and historic areas that are on either side of the path. An interpretive walking tour brochure is available. A 2 mile connector trail links the Union Canal Trail to the 30 mile trail system around Blue Marsh Lake.

THE DISTELFINK



Donated to the Parks & Recreation Department in 1985 by the Berks Arts Council, the Distelfink is representative of Pennsylvania German Folk Art. Translated to mean thistlefinch, our bird brightly wishes happiness and good luck to all of our visitors.

HOURS OF OPERATION

May 1st until the last Sunday of October
 Tuesday - Saturday: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
 Sunday: 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 Closed Mondays

Last tour leaves one hour before closing.

Country Store and Snack Bar
 Open Memorial Day, Independence Day
 and Labor Day

For more information call:
 610-374-8839

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

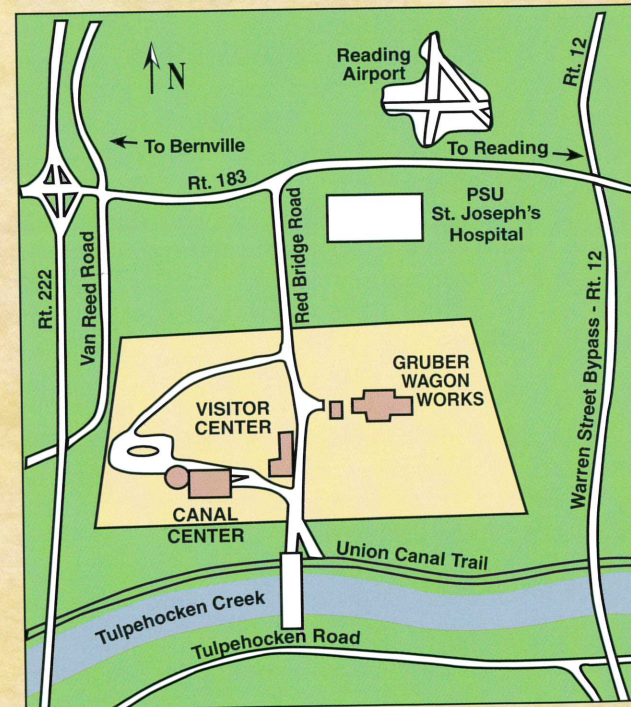
to the Berks County Heritage Center
 1102 Red Bridge Road, Reading, PA 19605

From Philadelphia and South/East: Rt. 422 W to Reading. Follow signs for Rt. 222 N (Allentown). Exit at Rt. 183. Turn right towards Reading Airport (Rt. 183 S), continue through traffic light. Turn at the next right, onto Red Bridge Road.

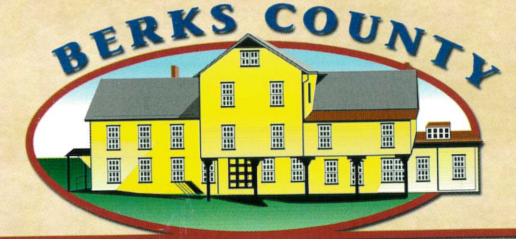
From Allentown and North: Rt. 22/78 W towards Harrisburg to Strausstown exit (Rt. 183). Follow Rt. 183 S past Blue Marsh Lake. Continue straight through the Rt. 222 intersection and turn right at the auto repair shop onto Red Bridge Road.

From Lancaster/York: Rt. 222 N (Reading/Allentown). Follow Route 222 N-Allentown. Exit at Rt. 183 S. Turn right towards Reading Airport. Continue through traffic light. Turn at the next right, onto Red Bridge Road.

From PA Turnpike - East or West: Take Morgantown Exit (exit 298) to Rt. I-176 N. Follow Rt. 422 W to 222 N (Allentown). Exit at Rt. 183. Turn right towards Reading Airport - Rt. 183 S, continue through traffic light. Turn at the next right, onto Red Bridge Road.



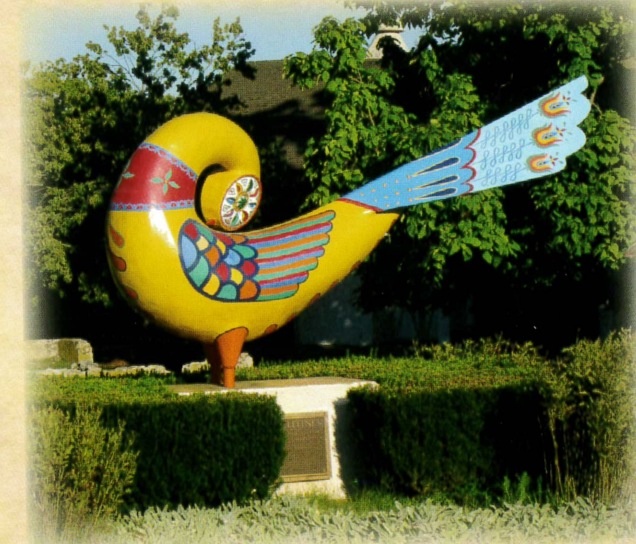
Mailing address:
 Berks County Parks Department - Heritage Center
 2201 Tulpehocken Road • Wyomissing, PA 19610
 610-374-8839
www.countyofberks.com/parks



HERITAGE CENTER



*Celebrating Important Eras
 In Our Cultural History*



County of Berks
COUNTY OF BERKS
 PENNSYLVANIA