

OIL CITY, PA

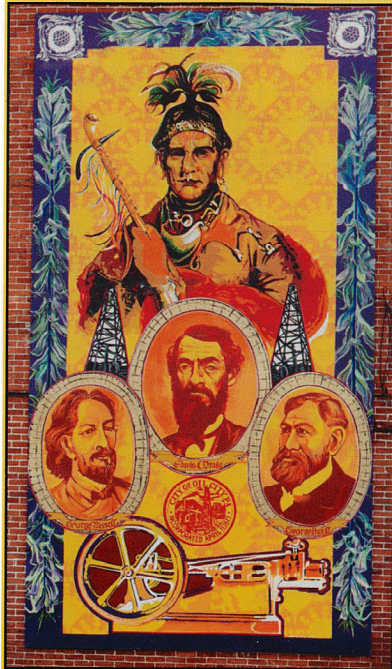


*Walking
and Driving
Tour*

Welcome to Oil City, PA —

a city with a unique history whose story spans hundreds of years! The purpose of this brochure is to provide you, whether you are new to the area or visiting after many years, a guide to experience the Oil City of today through driving and walking routes of the city's distinct places.

But first, a little history —



Mural of Cornplanter and oil industrialists on Central Avenue

Native Americans inhabited the area for generations before the arrival of European settlers. Members of the Seneca Tribe were here when French explorers arrived in the late 1700s. The Seneca were aware of oil in the creek and collected it in timber-lined pits. Seneca Chief Cornplanter was granted three land tracts in the 1790s by the PA Commonwealth in appreciation for his services

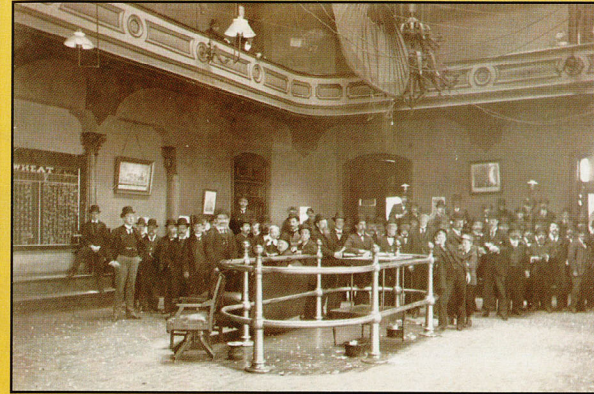
during the American Revolution. One tract of about 300 acres included what would become Oil City.

The first settlers within the current city boundary were Francis and Sarah Halyday, who lived near the confluence of Oil Creek and the Allegheny River. New residents arrived slowly to the area into the mid-19th century.

Circumstances changed dramatically after Edwin Drake's successful oil strike along Oil Creek just outside of Titusville. In 1859, the settlement, then called

Cornplanter, at the mouth of Oil Creek at the Allegheny River included about 25 people and a few buildings.

As people arrived to join the booming oil industry, many became residents of the immediate area. In 1861, the name of the town was changed to Oil City and the municipal government was organized the next year. In 1865, the population was approximately 6,000. That's quite an increase from just 25 people six years earlier!



Workers pose inside the former Oil Exchange Building. Image courtesy of the Heritage Society of Oil City.

Oil City became the hub for oil transport — first by waterways, then by train, and later by pipeline. Many companies operated within the area and successful operations expanded, attracting more residents. In 1871, Oil City was incorporated as a city and municipal improvement projects, such as sewer and new water supply systems, soon followed.

The oil fields boomed until the discovery of larger fields in other states and countries in the 20th century. Several oil-related companies in Oil City remained in operation, but eventually they ceased operations or relocated.

The oil boom helped shape Oil City into the place it is today. During your tour, you will see impressive Victorian style houses, stately civic buildings, magnificent houses of worship, former company headquarter buildings, and much more.

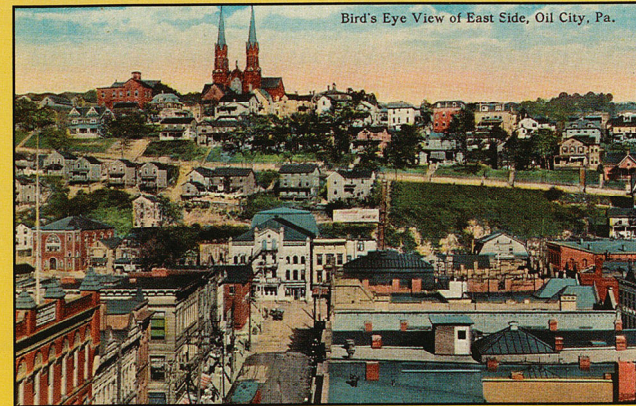
Historic Districts

Due to the city's topography, Oil City developed in several sections, but generally in the same period. This development is evident when traveling through the city's three National Register of Historic Places-listed Historic Districts: Oil City South Side, Oil City North Side, and Oil City Downtown Commercial historic districts.

The tour begins in the **Oil City South Side Historic District**. This area contains commercial and residential developments associated with the oil industry, but did not include as many industrial concerns as other parts of the city. In 1863, William Lay platted and sold lots in Laytonia – his new town development. Residential development started along the Allegheny River and commercial entities began along Front and First streets. New developers purchased large land tracts to spread residential growth up the hillsides. In 1866, the settlements of Laytonia, Imperial, and Leetown on the south side of the river petitioned the county to merge as Venango City and then merged with Oil City in 1871. The South Side became the desired area to live given the availability of larger lots on more level ground. As you travel through this area, you will notice grand homes designed in Victorian architectural styles popular during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The South Side also includes several churches, social organizational buildings, and a commercial district.

The **Oil City North Side Historic District**, the largest of the three districts, includes mostly working- and upper-class homes from the mid-19th through early 20th centuries. In 1863, lots were laid out along Grove Avenue and in 1864, 300 acres were laid out beyond this street, creating what would become known as the Cottage Hill neighborhood. The North Side was ideal for workers as smaller lots were more affordable for families and the area placed workers closer to places of employment, such as Oil Well Supply Co., Imperial Refinery Co., and Oil City Tube Co.— later the Oil City Boiler Works. In the late 19th century, Polish immigrants came to the city and settled in the northern portion of

the district, which became known as Polish Hill. This area remains mainly residential with a few churches and businesses.



*Postcard of Downtown Oil City and North Side neighborhood, circa 1910.
Note the steeples of St. Joseph Church at the top.*

The **Oil City Downtown Commercial Historic District** comprises the area north of the Allegheny River and east of Oil Creek. Prior to 1859, this area was called Oilville and had about 25 residents and a few businesses. As the other parts of the city developed to meet the expanding residential needs, this area experienced commercial development along Seneca, Elm, Center, and Sycamore streets. It also became the hub for major oil-related corporations. Standard Oil's National Transit Co.'s headquarters building was at the corner of Seneca and Center streets; Pennzoil was headquartered at Seneca and Duncomb streets; United Natural Gas was headquartered in the five-story building diagonal on Seneca Street; Wolf's Head's offices were in the building at the end of Veteran's Memorial Bridge; and Quaker State was in the 1970s multi-story building at the end of Elm Street. These buildings currently house new uses, illustrating major changes in Oil City since the late 20th century.

Additional Routes

This brochure provides an overview of Oil City through a combination driving and walking tour. This ultimately does not cover every block of the city. Below are two side routes from the driving tour route that go further into the city's history.



Postcard of Siverly, circa 1900. The Oilwell Supply Co. complex is near the center of the image.

Side Route #1 – Siverly

Directions: *Instead of turning onto Harriott Ave. from Spring St., continue straight on Colbert Ave. for approximately 1 mile to the Oil City Industrial Park. After exploring Siverly, return to the tour via Colbert Ave. to Spring St., then turn right onto Harriott Ave. to continue on the main tour.*

Siverly began as a small riverside settlement, founded by Abraham George Siverly, in the early 19th century. In 1872, however, Jacob Vandergrift opened Imperial Refinery, a refinery, gasoline and wax works, and barrel factory in Siverly, which increased its population to almost 700 by 1880. The Warren & Franklin Railroad (later the Western New York & Pennsylvania Railroad) came through Siverly, bringing with it more jobs. The Imperial Refinery, once the largest inland refinery in the country, was purchased by the Standard Oil Company, ultimately closing in 1894.

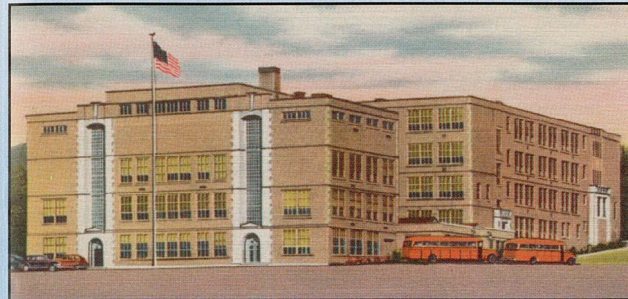
Oilwell Supply Company, whose roots extend to 1862 when John Eaton established a supply company for the oil industry in Oil City, expanded into Siverly at the turn of the 20th century.

As Siverly grew, it implemented civic improvements, and then merged into Oil City in 1910. The 20th century was good for the area as Oilwell and the railroad offered steady employment and residential development expanded up the hillsides.

Oilwell Supply closed in the early 1980s and the city of Oil City purchased part of its parcel to be developed into an industrial park. Some of the Oilwell buildings remain and are occupied by various tenants.

Side Route #2 – Oil City Middle and High Schools, Calvary Cemetery

Directions: *Instead of turning left from E. Bissell Ave. into Hasson Park, continue up the hill for about 0.5-miles, then turn right onto Lynch Blvd. The schools are on the right at the top of the hill. The cemetery is just past the schools. Travel via the same route to return to the main tour, turning right into Hasson Park.*



Former junior high school building at Graff and Spring streets, currently an open lot.

The high school portion of the building opened for the 1967-1968 school year and the middle school portion was added to the north side of the high school building in 1996.

In 1908, three Roman Catholic parishes purchased about 30 acres to create Calvary Cemetery as the Catholic community needed more room beyond what was available at the St. Joseph Cemetery. The mausoleum was added in 1973.

Welcome to Oil City!

This tour will provide you with an overview of Oil City— from its three historic districts, collection of church buildings, remnants of its industrial past, to its numerous examples of Victorian style residential architecture. While the Tour covers a lot of ground, there are still opportunities for you to further explore Oil City!

Our tour begins at the Oil City Library. Park by the library, then continue with the first walking tour portion.

1. The Oil City Library opened in 1904 with funding assistance from Andrew Carnegie and a book collection started by the Belles Lettres Club. Go inside to learn more about the city's history, see what events are happening, and what else the library now offers besides books!

2. Oil City includes several historic churches and two are very close to the library. Next door is the Christ Episcopal Church, designed by Enoch A. Curtis. Work started in 1886 to accommodate the growing congregation. The Grace United Methodist Church, across W. 1st St., was started in 1892 by architect W. Holmes Crosby with a rear addition built in 1955. Both churches remain active.

3. The South Side commercial area stretches along E. 1st St. between Central Ave. and State St. Retail businesses and offices are in this block. A walk along the street will allow you to see unique architectural details, like the Art Deco tile of the 1928 Latonia Theater and the symbolism in the 1901 Masonic Hall building.

To begin the driving portion of the tour, go west on E. Front St., turn left at the light onto Petroleum St. Continue straight through the traffic light.

4. The Oil City Knights of Columbus, established in 1899, dedicated this auditorium in June 1928. The firm of Brenot & Hicks designed the building and L.O. Bouquin & Co. constructed it. The auditorium continues as event space for various groups and gatherings.

Turn right at the first stop sign onto W. 3rd St., bear left at St. Stephen's School to remain on W. 3rd St.

5. St. Stephen School is a Roman Catholic elementary school that opened in 1955 to accommodate up to 600 students. While the school was established in 1945, it quickly outgrew the space, which led to the construction of this building. The school remains in operation.

Continue on W. 3rd St., bear left at its intersection with Division and Lincoln streets.

6. The house at 205 W. 3rd St. was built in 1898 by Henry Suhr, who co-founded the Penn Refining and Germania Refinery companies. Through mergers, these companies became part of the Pennzoil Corporation in the 20th century. Suhr is interred at Grove Hill Cemetery (a later stop on the tour).

Many of the other houses on W. 3rd St. were constructed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries on small lots. Most have alleys at the rear of the lots that led to (or lead to – some survive!) carriage houses or garages.

Continue on W. 3rd St., then turn right onto Moran St. Moran St. is named for the Moran family who settled in what would become Oil City in 1845. Two of Thomas Moran's sons, Daniel and Thomas J., held the position of Oil City street commissioner in the 1880s.

7. The house at 114 Moran St. (second house on the left side) was built in 1882 by Willis J. Hulings, an active politician who served in the PA House of Representatives from 1881–1886, PA State Senate from 1906–1910, and US House of Representatives from 1913–1915 and 1919–1921. Hulings is also buried in Grove Hill Cemetery.

Turn right onto W. 1st St. and remain on this street for several blocks.

W. 1st St. includes stately houses on the right side of the street that were constructed by industrial leaders of the 19th century. Houses on the left side may be on smaller lots, but are also excellent examples of Victorian architectural styles. Look for details such as irregular layouts, round turrets on the corners, and decorative woodwork on the porches and gable pitches.

8. The Belles Lettres Club, formed in 1888 as a women's club to study literature, was integral to the establishment of the Oil City Library. Henry McSweeney gave this

building, his former home, to the club in 1923. He also provided an endowment that was used to construct the auditorium in 1929. The club remains active in various causes.

9. One modern building on W. 1st St. is diagonal from Belle Lettres. The Tree of Life Synagogue was constructed in 1957, but the Jewish community in Oil City dates to at least 1891 when the first Jewish congregation formed in the city. The congregation sold the property to the Oil City YMCA in 2019.

10. The Second Presbyterian Church at the corner of W. 1st and Reed streets was designed in 1913 by architect Emmett E. Bailey in the Late Gothic Revival style. The building features heavy stone walls, delicate stained glass windows, and an expansive tile roof.

Stay on W. 1st St., and then turn left onto State St.

11. St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church was constructed in 1906 as the community outgrew the first parish of St. Joseph's (a later stop on the tour). This Mission style, stone building was designed by William P. Ginther, who designed churches in Ohio and western Pennsylvania.

Continue across Veterans Memorial Bridge. You are now on Elm St. in Oil City's North Side. At the third traffic light, turn right onto Center St. Cross the railroad tracks, then turn right at the T-intersection onto Spring St.

Make the first left onto Harriott Ave. to remain on the tour, and turn left on Pearl Ave.

Continue straight to follow Side Route #1 into Siverly.

12. Calvary Temple Church was constructed in 1906 – 1907 as the First United Presbyterian Church. After a merger, this building was offered for sale. In 1960, the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church purchased the property. Calvary Temple assumed ownership in 1992.

Continue up Pearl Ave. to St. Joseph Catholic Church.

13. The St. Joseph Catholic complex includes the church, rectory, and former convent. The church was designed by Adolphus Druiding, the architect for numerous Catholic churches across the country. The church was completed in 1894 and served the entire Oil City Catholic community until other parishes were added in the early 20th century.

Turn right onto Seeley Ave. and continue for 5 full blocks to Cedar Ave. Turn right onto Cedar Ave. and continue to its intersection with Bishop Ave. where you will see the main entrance to Grove Hill Cemetery.

As you travel along Seeley and Cedar avenues, you are seeing residential development within the Oil City North Side Historic District. Notice the difference in topography and lot sizes from the South Side. Many of these houses were built for employees of the city's oil-related industries.

14. A cemetery association was created in 1870, and Grove Hill Cemetery was dedicated in June 1871. The steep slopes of the cemetery offer commanding views of Oil City—walk or drive through to experience the grounds.

15. St. Joseph Cemetery adjoins Grove Hill, but is only accessible via an entrance on Bishop Ave. The land for the Catholic cemetery was thought to be sufficient; however, as the Catholic community grew, Calvary Cemetery was developed by what are now the middle and high schools.

Continue to the end of Bishop Ave., then turn right onto Carroll Ave. Next, turn left onto E. Bissell Ave. Continue for about 0.5 miles to the Hasson Park entrance and turn left into the park.

To take Side Route #2, stay straight on E. Bissell Ave.

16. Hasson Park was established in 1895 from a gift of 44 acres of undeveloped land to the City from Capt. William Hasson. The wooded park includes playgrounds, picnic shelters, hiking trails, and a disc golf course.

At the Y intersection, bear right to continue straight onto Traction St., then, turn right onto Park Ave.

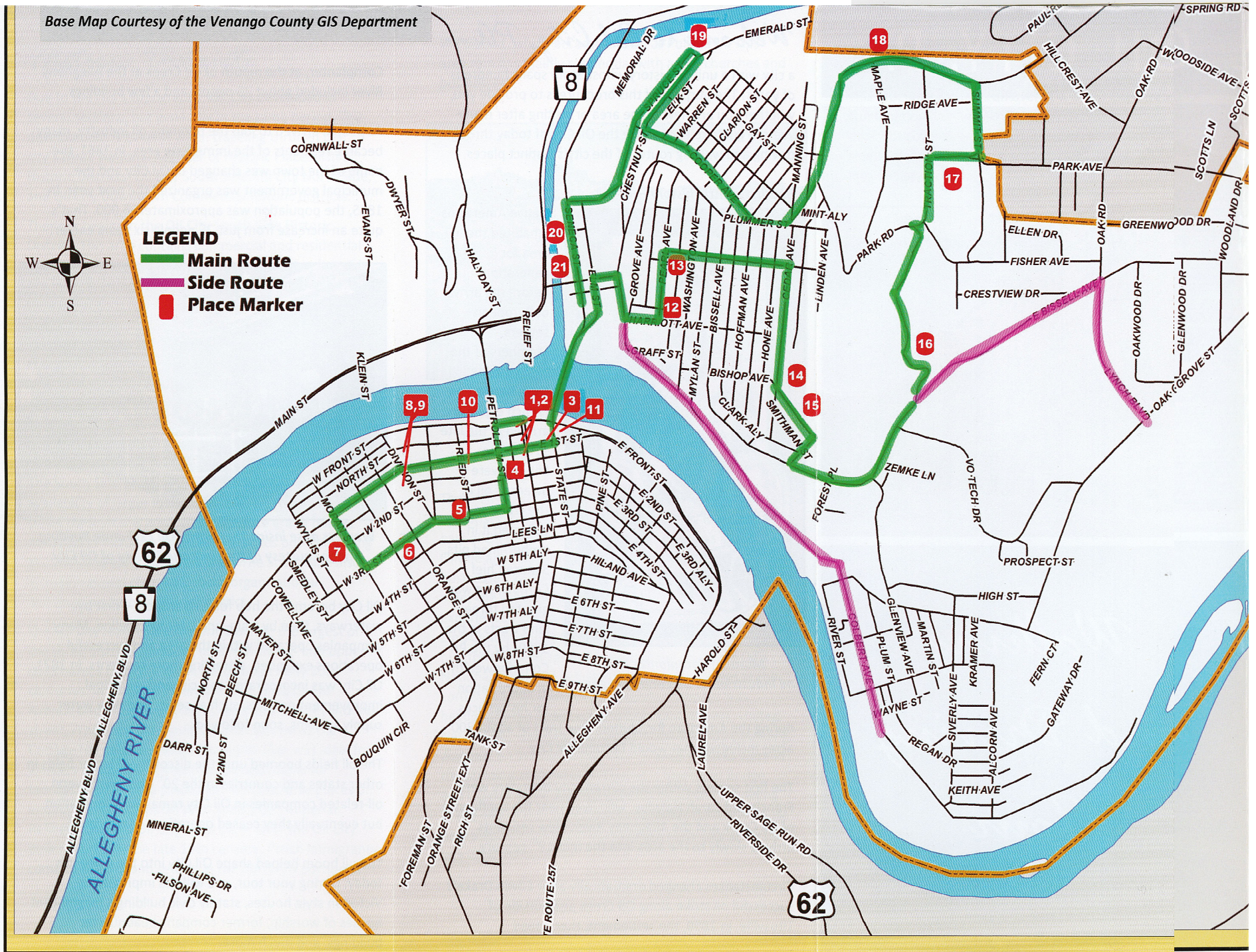
17. The James A. Nelles Memorial Swimming Pool opened in 2008 and is open each summer. The parcel is part of another donation to the City from Capt. Hasson that now includes the baseball field and dek hockey rink.

Turn left onto Summit St. At the end of the street, turn left onto Grandview Ave. Travel about 0.25 miles, then turn into the small parking lot on the right side – look for the 'Enter Here →' sign.

Base Map Courtesy of the Venango County GIS Department



LEGEND
Main Route
Side Route
Place Marker



18. Murray's Scenic Overlook was dedicated in 2011. Walk along the path, read the interpretative signs, and view the hills and "the Valley that Changed the World!"

Turn right from the lot, travel on Plummer St. for about 0.6 miles. Bear right onto Cooper/Hoffman Ave. Stay straight on Cooper Ave., going downhill for about 0.4 miles, then turn right onto Emerald St.

This area of Oil City is known as Polish Hill because it attracted many Polish immigrants when they found work in local factories. Houses in this area are mostly unadorned buildings constructed on small lots. Many have garages at the rear of the parcels accessible via alleyways.

Make the first left onto Pulaski St.

19. This is the site of the former Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic church and school, which were indicative of the city's Polish heritage. In 1899, enough Catholic Polish immigrants were living in the area to warrant a new congregation and parish church. The school closed in 1970 and the church closed in 2017. The nearby Polish Heritage Memorial Park celebrates the city's Polish history and culture.

Turn left onto Spruce St., then proceed 0.5 miles. Bear right onto Duncomb St., then turn left onto Seneca St. Park along Seneca St. to walk the Oil City Commercial Historic District and visit shops and restaurants.

20. The Venango Museum of Art, Science & Industry is housed in a former U.S. Post Office. The Museum exhibits materials relevant to Venango County residents and visitors. It is open seasonally and includes the Oil City Visitor Center, which is accessible without paid admission, that provides more information on regional attractions.

21. The National Transit Building and Annex were constructed in 1890 and 1896. The National Transit Company was the oil pipeline branch of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company and these buildings housed its offices. Currently, the buildings have offices, artist studios, and retail spaces. Enter the red brick building along Seneca St. to view a mural depicting the Oil Region's and the National Transit's histories.

***This concludes the Oil City Walking and Driving Tour!
There is more to discover, so enjoy exploring further!***



217 Elm St., Oil City, PA 16301
800.483.6264 OilRegion.org

The mission of the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism is to manage the Oil Region National Heritage Area and to increase the prosperity of the Oil Region by enticing people to live, work, learn and play in "the Valley that Changed the World" through the preservation, promotion, development, and support of historical, educational, natural, recreational, residential, commercial and industrial destinations.

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