

Old City

The first permanent settlement in Philadelphia was located between Vine and Walnut Streets, from Front to 4th streets. Within this compact area were houses, shops, public markets, and schools, as well as numerous religious buildings. Second and Market streets was the heart of the city and the location of the Greater Quaker Meetinghouse and the principal Anglican church.

As the residential population gradually moved south and west in the 19th century, commercial and industrial buildings of varying architectural styles replaced the colonial houses. Old City was rediscovered in the 1980s when it was designated a National Register Historic District. This led to the conversion of commercial loft buildings to residential use and contributed to the creation of a vibrant neighborhood with numerous art galleries, restaurants, and distinctive shops. This rich history surrounds some of the oldest and most historic religious properties in Philadelphia.

The walking tour of sacred sites in Old City begins at 2nd and Market streets.



Christ Church (Episcopal)

2nd Street, between Market and Arch streets

**1727-44, Dr. John Kearsley, supervisor
1751-54, steeple, Robert Smith**

*Services: Sunday: 9am, 11am;
Wednesday, 12pm*

*Also open: Monday – Saturday: 9am – 5pm;
Sunday: 1 – 5pm*

*Closed major holidays and on Monday and
Tuesday in January and February*

215-922-1695—www.christchurchphila.org

William Penn's charter from the king specified that Anglican ministers could settle freely in Pennsylvania. They arrived early, established a church at 2nd and Market streets in 1695 and constructed a wooden chapel there in 1697. When the new church was built, it was modeled after the work of British architect Sir Christopher Wren, who rebuilt many of the churches in London after the Great Fire. In the colonial era, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Betsy Ross and some members of Penn's family worshipped here; their pews are marked with commemorative plaques. After the Revolution, a new denomination, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, was founded here.

Christ Church is a National Historic Landmark and a superb example of Georgian architecture. It is distinguished by high-relief exterior details including projecting cornices, arches, quoins, round-arched windows and a balustrade hiding the roof. On the east wall, a large Palladian window provides light for the chancel. The 200-foot steeple, financed by lotteries sponsored by Benjamin Franklin, was the tallest structure in North America for nearly 100 years.

While the church appears to have changed little since its construction, the interior has been remodeled several times and was most recently restored in the 1980s.



Arch Street Meetinghouse

Arch Street, between 3rd and 4th streets

1803-11, Owen Biddle, architect

1968, addition, Cope and Lippincott

Services: Sunday: 10:30am; Wednesday: 7pm

Also open: Monday – Saturday: 10am – 4pm

215-627-2667—www.archstreetfriends.org

William Penn and many early settlers of Pennsylvania were members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Penn gave this site to the Quaker community in 1701 for use as a burial ground. When the Great Meetinghouse at 2nd and Market streets could no longer accommodate the Yearly Meetings when men and women met separately for business, this new meetinghouse was constructed. It was first occupied by the Women's Yearly Meeting in the east wing, then joined by the Men's Yearly Meeting when the west wing was completed.

Arch Street Meetinghouse is the second oldest and largest meetinghouse in the city. The plain brick structure with simple porticos over the doorways reflects Friends' rejection of ornamentation and symbolism. The west wing retains its original character, with plain wood floors and wooden benches. The east wing contains dioramas depicting highlights of William Penn's career and other changing exhibits.

The meetinghouse is the home of the Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia, which worships here weekly. The annual sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting are held here in March. The meetinghouse frequently hosts gatherings and conferences of organizations active in work for peace and social justice.



Old First Reformed Church, United Church of Christ

4th and Race streets

1837, Andrew D. Caldwell, builder

1976, restored, Paul Richard Frantz, architect

Services: Sunday: 11am

Also open: Monday – Friday: 8am – 2pm

Inquire at church office, 151 North Fourth Street or by telephone.

215-922-4566—www.oldfirstucc.org

Old First Reformed Church was founded by a German congregation in 1727. As the congregation grew, a second church was built on the site, followed by the current church in 1837. However, by the 1880s the neighborhood consisted primarily of commercial businesses and warehouses. The congregation moved to North and then West Philadelphia, and the church became a paint manufacturing company and warehouse.

In 1967, the congregation learned that its former neighborhood was to be revitalized and that the old church building was for sale. The group voted to return to the original location and began a 10-year process of restoring the church. The plain exterior brick structure houses a large light-filled sanctuary on the second floor, which contains the original altar surround discovered behind the partitions of the paint warehouse.

Old First Reformed Church has an active social ministry; it holds a summer day camp in North Philadelphia, hosts concerts and community meetings, a winter homeless shelter, a weekly food cupboard, work camps for youth from around the country and a live-animal crèche at Christmas.