

COAST MAGAZINE

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PHILADELPHIA REVISTED

RV HOPPING THE
HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

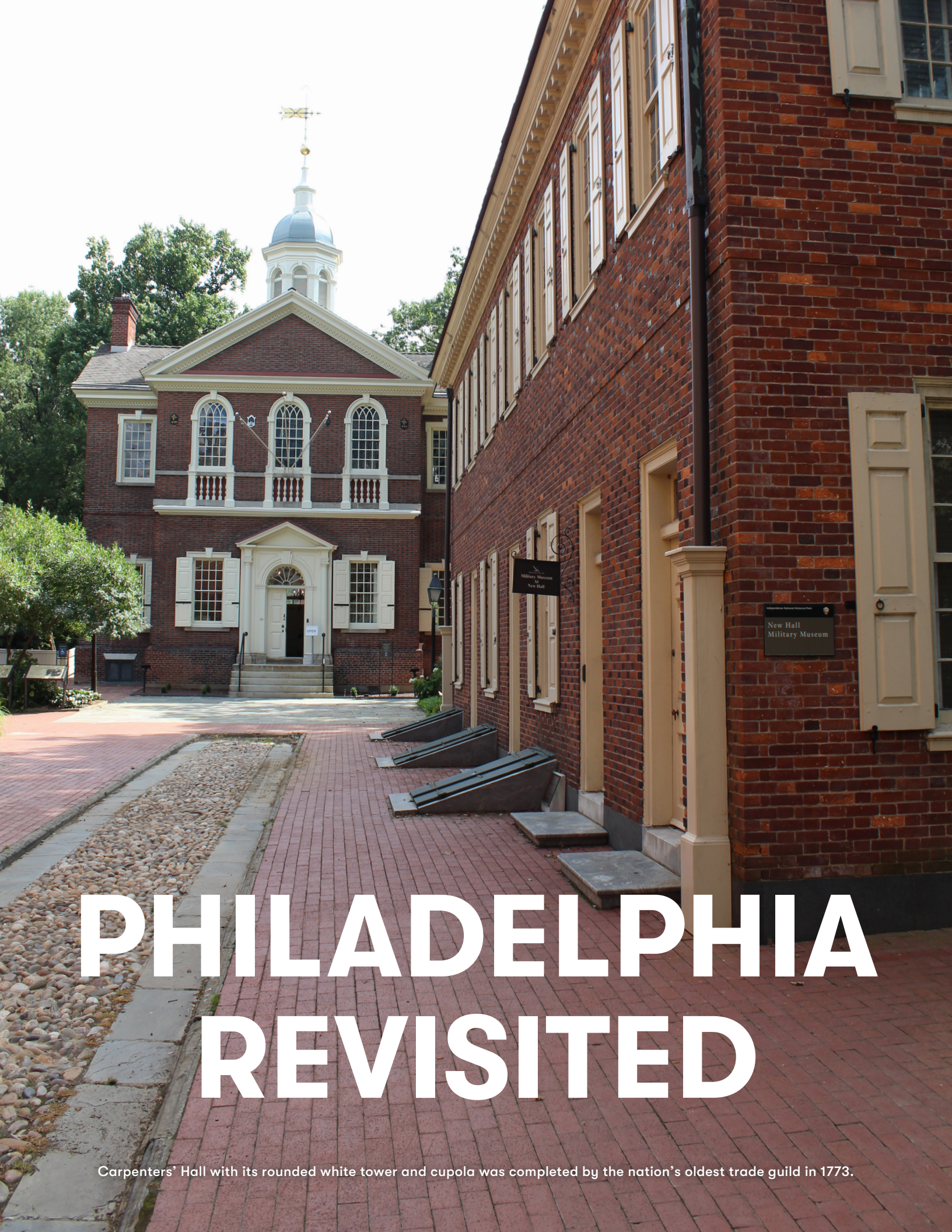
SARASOTA, AN ARTSY
BEACH TOWN WITH FLAIR

SPRING DESTINATIONS

LAKE SHORE RESORT
Davison, Michigan

**GETTYSBURG
BATTLEFIELD RESORT**
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

**GHOST MOUNTAIN
RANCH**
Pollock Pines, California



PHILADELPHIA REVISITED

Carpenters' Hall with its rounded white tower and cupola was completed by the nation's oldest trade guild in 1773.

Philadelphia Revisited

The Founding Fathers Revealed

Story and Photos by Richard Varr

It's twilight in the City of Brotherly Love, and I'm on a tour offering what you might call a different perspective of Philadelphia's colonial history. I'm standing outside the American Philosophical Society Library with a statue of native son Benjamin Franklin flanking a stack of books. It was Franklin who founded the Library Company of Philadelphia, America's first lending library, but what I hear this evening is something I never read in the history books.

"The building is not original. It burned down, but they rebuilt it to the original specifications with the original materials," explains tour guide Steve Miller. "And the ghosts are still original as well," he quips. "Franklin famously haunts the stairwell and also his office in the back of the building." Yes, Miller is a guide with Philadelphia Ghost Tour and adds that sightings of the famous founding father are different throughout the year. "He shows up for a couple seconds and then he disappears. Sometimes he appears aggressive or confused," says Miller.

A short time later, we have a twilight view of America's most famous statehouse, Independence Hall, with its whitewashed columned clock tower. Framed by the leafy trees of this section of Independence National Historical Park, the famous 1753 Georgian architecture-style building is where delegates signed both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. But on this night, I learn it was also used as an ad hoc hospital during the American Revolution. And the tour's version is again about spooky sightings.

"The ghosts will show up wounded at the top of the stairs at the landing," Miller says. "This cloud starts to form and out of it they'll see this man in war clothes sometimes tattered and sometimes injured and a limb will be missing because amputation was very common back then."

While I frankly find it hard to believe in such ghostly sightings, the tour does reveal some of Philadelphia's macabre and darker moments.



The Philadelphia skyline as seen from the top of the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

For example, we stop in Washington Square, now a pleasant shaded park with benches and walking paths, which was in fact once a burial ground. Miller raises the grisly scenario of how bones sometimes surface due to soil erosion from flooding rainfalls. That's because several thousand bodies including Revolutionary War soldiers and victims of the city's 1793 yellow fever epidemic were interred here in shallow graves. Today, the Tomb of the Unknown Revolutionary War Soldier with an eternal flame sits on one side of the square.

The ghost tour was just one activity during my four-day visit to one of America's most historic cities, and my most extensive touring since I lived there and researched and wrote the *Dorling Kindersley Eyewitness Travel Guide to Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Dutch Country* 20 years ago. From Old City's Independence Hall, Liberty Bell, and Christ Church where the founding fathers worshipped, to Center City's glistening skyline and the *Rocky* movies-made-famous grand 72 stone steps leading up to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, it seems not much has changed. While there are a few more skyscrapers and seemingly forever-changing restaurants like in any town, the major attractions remain must-see things to do.

What I did find new since my last Philly visit is the Museum of the American Revolution, opened in 2017. With dioramas and artifacts including 18th-century muskets, personal diaries and letters, to name a few, the museum traces the events leading up to the 13 Colonies revolting against England and the timeline of the war. But the highlight and must-see exhibit is Gen. George Washington's Revolutionary War Tent,



Washington's Tent with full light, courtesy Museum of the American Revolution.

the actual canvas battleground headquarters where Washington slept and commanded the Continental Army from 1778 up until the war-ending 1781 Battle of Yorktown.

“The tent is like seeing a tangible connection to the past when Gen. Washington was sitting on his camp stool and writing correspondence—when writing in moments of triumph but also in some of the darkest moments when it looked like the American Revolution wasn’t going to succeed,” says Matthew Skic, the museum’s Curator of Exhibitions. “This tent was witness to that—an emotional thing when thinking about the decision-making that was going on in that tent.”

Washington’s war tent, in fact, is the star of its own show with actual hourly theater presentations. Each begins with a 12-minute movie projected on a partially see-through screen in front of the tent, followed by dim lights revealing its outline until the lights are turned up full. That’s when visitors get a clear look at the off-white tent with its ascending roof that drops down to a decorative valance with edges of red worsted-wool binding. Keeping lights low for most of the show is to preserve the heavy-weight linen canvas, explains Skic. “It’s in quite good shape for being just about 250 years old and that’s why we feel comfortable displaying it the way we do.”

At one point, a shadow is cast upon one side of the tent—a figure of a man inside walking against what appears to be flickering candlelight. Perhaps it’s how Washington’s image actually appeared when working inside, I wonder. The shadow effect is possible because that side of the tent’s walls didn’t survive and is thus a reproduction with thin fabric designed for such a light projection. “So, at one point you’re able to

see inside the tent to see what it looks like and get a glimpse of an inner chamber,” adds Skic. Adding to the intrigue is the tent’s history. Ownership passed down from Washington eventually to the family of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee when George and Martha Washington’s great granddaughter, Mary Anna Randolph Custis, married Lee in 1831—a bit of irony perhaps considering Washington fought to establish a new nation while the Confederacy’s aim was to split it apart.

The museum’s very life-like dioramas include a fully uniformed Gen. Washington breaking up a street brawl in Harvard Yard, figurines of Oneida Nation Native Americans debating whether to side with the Americans or British, and colonial protestors—fired up by a first reading of the Declaration of Independence—preparing to topple a replica statue of England’s King George III in New York City. “Most of the statue was melted down and turned into 42,000 musket balls to fire back at the British,” says Skic. “One newspaper account called it ‘melted majesty.’”

It’s easy to trace the founding fathers’ footsteps in Old City Philadelphia, a compact neighborhood stretching from 6th and 7th street on the west side to the Delaware River on its east end. Often referred to as “America’s Most Historic Square Mile,” the district is an open-air museum of sorts with many of the actual buildings—or their reconstructions—in which our nation’s government and institutions were formed, all in walking distance of each other.

Stepping out of the Museum of the American Revolution, I cross 3rd Street and walk up the steps of the First Bank of the United States fronted by its massive Corinthian columns—the same steps once used by Alexander Hamilton,



Brawl at Harvard Yard with George Washington, a diorama in the Museum of the American Revolution.



The Museum of the American Revolution.



The Second Bank of the United States.

the country's first Secretary of the Treasury. Just a block away stands the Greek temple-like Second Bank of the United States, now a gallery with portraits of our early presidents and other colonial-era people painted by the likes of Gilbert Stuart, Thomas Sully, and Charles Willson Peale, among others.

Nearby Carpenters' Hall with its rounded white tower and cupola was completed by the nation's oldest trade guild in 1773. Just a year later, however, it was the meeting place of the First Continental Congress, where representatives of 12 of the 13 original colonies banded together and agreed to boycott British imports. It's where patriot Patrick Henry was quoted saying, "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American."

Independence Hall runs daily tours highlighting its historic chambers where both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were debated and signed. In the nearby Constitution Center, I walk amid the bronze statues of the document's 39 signers and 3 dissenters, including George Washington standing tall behind a desk, Alexander Hamilton with a walking cane and a finger-pointing Benjamin Franklin seated at a table surrounded by fellow delegates. Other historic sites include the Liberty Bell



U.S. Constitution Center Signers' Hall, with bronze statues of the 39 signers and 3 dissenters.

Center directly across Chestnut Street from Independence Hall, the home of flag sewer Betsy Ross, and the reconstructed City Tavern where politicians once debated and businessmen struck deals. The President's House Site is an open-air outline and base of Washington's and John Adams' home while serving as first and second Commander in Chief. Today, plaques pay homage to the enslaved workers who lived there during Washington's presidency.

In Franklin Court, steel beams serve as an outline of what was Benjamin Franklin's three-story home. A museum highlights his life, inventions, and accomplishments as the foremost diplomat and statesman during colonial times, the American Revolution and during the early years of our nation.

Georgian-style Christ Church is where Washington, Franklin, and other founding fathers attended services with plaques marking their pews. Just a few blocks away, the church's cemetery is the final resting place of five signers of the Declaration of Independence, including Franklin, whose grave is at the corner of Arch and 5th streets, where passersby toss coins onto it. In a twist of sorts, Philadelphia's U.S. Mint directly across Arch Street has the capacity to pound out up to 32 million coins a day.

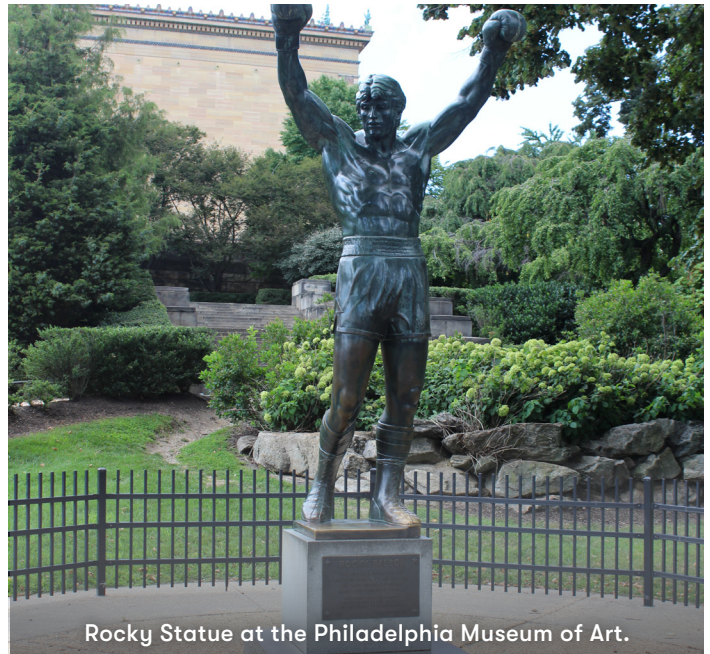
To see an authentic example of colonial Philadelphia, I stop at Elfreth's Alley, the nation's oldest residential street, where modern-day Philadelphians still reside in the more than 200-300 year-old brick rowhouses. "Within the bounds of modern living, I try to respect the history of the house," says Brenda Frank, a resident of one of the homes since 1990. "I feel a responsibility to keep it as original as possible.

I would never do anything to mar the floors or change the woodwork.”

“This was a completely working class street for most of its history, which means people lived and worked right in their homes,” says Jennifer Boch, a staff member with Elfreth’s Alley’s two house museums with their narrow stairwells and low ceiling rooms. “They were dressmakers, shoemakers, bakers, and other types of artisan occupations. They built Philadelphia.”

Philadelphia was founded by Quaker William Penn in 1682, between the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers. “Penn laid out the city in a nice orderly grid formation with wide streets and brick buildings because he grew up in London where things were cramped and streets were narrow and winding,” explains Mark Marano, the site manager of the 1804 Arch Street Meeting House on Arch Street which continues to host Quaker worship and meetings to the present day. Penn’s city grid with four outlying squares also included a center square where a statue of Penn stands atop the grand French Renaissance Revival Philadelphia City Hall.

One of the others is Logan Square—now with a traffic circle—where the stunning Swann Memorial Fountain features sculptures in so-called “river god” tradition to highlight the city’s surrounding waterways. The square sits about halfway along the grand Benjamin Franklin Parkway that stretches from City Hall to the “Rocky Steps” of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Art. Perched on a hill, the museum offers great views of the city skyline and Schuylkill River. And yes, a statue of the movie series’ Rocky character remains, often with crowds lined up for photos.

Many of the city’s other prominent museums are also located along the parkway. In addition to paintings by Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso, the Barnes Foundation’s Impressionist collection includes 181 Renoir artworks, the most anywhere in the world. The Rodin Museum houses one of the largest collections of sculptor Auguste Rodin’s works outside Paris. Kids will particularly enjoy the Franklin Institute with its interactive science and technology exhibits, and Dinosaur Hall with its 42-foot-long T-Rex fossil within the Academy of Natural Sciences. Both museums flank Logan Square.

Of course, no visit to Philadelphia would be complete without biting into a Philly cheesesteak sandwich, which you can find at almost any corner pizzeria. For an extraordinary experience, head to South Philadelphia to Geno’s Steaks or Pat’s King of Steaks, both emblazoned with neon lights and located across the street from each other. Visitors are often hard pressed to make a choice!

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www.visitphilly.com