

“Steeples and Steel”

“We three were blown away today by the beauty of the churches and the depth of knowledge we learned about ‘the Steel’”. These words of Janet Herr of Pen Argyl describe her experience on the inaugural “Steeples and Steel” tour and open house.

Cosponsored by the Steelworkers’ Archives and South Bethlehem Historical Society and funded through a Northampton County grant, this series of minibus tours pays tribute to the 19th and early 20th century European immigrants who left their homelands in search of a better life in America and settled in ethnic enclaves in South Bethlehem. Many of these immigrants became steelworkers and began a lifelong relationship with Bethlehem Steel. They also helped build their ethnic churches, often after completing grueling shifts in the steel mill. Many of these churches, centers of community life, recruited and sponsored new immigrants for employment at Bethlehem Steel, as a larger workforce was needed to meet the demands of the growing company. This “patchwork quilt” of South Bethlehem ethnic communities changed as the churches became spiritual homes and community centers for later immigrant groups from Spain, Portugal, Mexico and Puerto Rico and to black migrants from the southern United States.

The “Steeples and Steel” tour leaves from St. John’s Windish Lutheran Church, 617 E. Fourth St., Bethlehem. St. John’s was founded in 1910 by immigrants from the Prekmurje region of what is now modern-day Slovenia.

The first hour of the tour is guided by a representative from the South Bethlehem Historical Society. The drive through the neighborhoods of South Bethlehem emphasizes the steelworker churches. One church is entered on each tour, guided by a church member. The second hour is a steelworker-guided tour of the site of the flagship Bethlehem Steel plant. The tour package also includes a “steelworker’s overtime” lunch, a recreation of the lunch provided by Bethlehem Steel when workers were scheduled for overtime shifts; these lunches were originally made at the Bethlehem Steel Club, then Goosey Gander.

“Steeples”



Susan L. Vitez

St. John’s Windish Lutheran Church/Bethlehem Steel Blast Furnaces



St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church * | SLV



Incarnation of Our Lord Roman Catholic Church | SLV

* Rev. Clifton E. Bishop, Pastor

And ...

The next tour date is September 20, with tours at 9:30 AM and 1:00 PM. The first tour features St. John A.M.E. Zion Church, chartered in 1894 and built in 1901 on Pawnee Street. Rev. Gracher L. Selby is the 29th pastor in the history of the church, which proudly has 4th generation members attending services today.

The second tour features Cathedral Church of the Nativity. The vestry was formed in November of 1862. Construction of the church was started in 1863, and the first worship service was held on Christmas Day 1864. The church was consecrated in April 1865. The Very Rev. Anthony R. Pompa is Dean and Rector.

Previous in-church visits were made to St. Joseph; Holy Ghost; Incarnation of Our Lord (formerly SS. Cyril and Methodius); Holy Infancy; and St. Ursula Roman Catholic Churches of the Diocese of Allentown and Concordia Lutheran Church, founded as St. John the Baptist Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church. Roger Hudak, grandson of a founding member, tells us that “as with many of the ethnic churches here, Concordia has had a tremendous historic significance here in Bethlehem, supplying Bethlehem Steel with many Slovak iron workers who lived and worked in south Bethlehem”.

These very successful tours are a “homecoming” for many, with guests traveling from surrounding counties, even out-of-state, to visit their family churches and the Bethlehem Steel plant site where relatives worked after arriving in Bethlehem generations ago. The Steelworkers’ Archives tour guides provide a glimpse into the working lives of steelworkers, including their own 30 to 40+ year careers, as well as the history of the plant and its impact throughout the world.

“Steel”



Blast Furnaces | SLV

St. John’s Windish Lutheran Church is also the site of the “Steeple and Steel” open house from 10:30 AM – 2:30 PM each of the tour dates. The open house is free and open to the public. The Reverend Suzanne Trump is the new pastor of St. John’s, and she cordially invites you to visit and enjoy the beautiful building and hospitality of the congregation.

The open house includes exhibits by the Steelworkers’ Archives, South Bethlehem Historical Society, St. John’s, Bethlehem/Murska Sobota Sister Cities Association, and the featured churches. A tour of St. John’s is scheduled for 12:15 PM and is led by Frank E. Podleiszek, a grandson of church founders. His presentation concludes with his singing of a hymn in Windish. Fundraisers include the “steelworker’s overtime” lunch for the Steelworkers’ Archives and Windish/Hungarian strudels and rolls for the Hungarian Evangelical Reformed Church of Bethlehem. The ethnic baked goods made by the Rev. Ron Hari and his dedicated group of church members and community volunteers remind many guests of their grandmothers’ baking. Proceeds help the small congregation keep their Hungarian church open. He promises there will be “lots of strudel ... lots of apple” for the September 20 open house.

Please visit the Steelworkers’ Archives website at www.steelworkersarchives.com or call us at 610.861.0600 for more information about the September 20 “Steeple and Steel” tours and open house and other upcoming events.

The “Steeple and Steel” planning committee extends its appreciation to the pastors, office staff, and members of the featured churches; St. John’s; B/MSSCA; the Diocese of Allentown; Northampton County DCED; and Steelworkers’ Archives and South Bethlehem Historical Society volunteers for supporting and participating in this event.

As Janet Herr concluded, “We feel no need to go to Europe to see amazing churches; they are in our own backyard.”

SLV