



Russ Slocum at Bernhart Dam. Photo by Karen Weber

# The Plein Air Painter's Guide to Berks County

P E N N S Y L V A N I A



From an artist's perspective, Berks County is uniquely multi-faceted. You can find some of practically anything here: bustling urban areas, rolling Amish farmlands. Waterways, forests, parks and valleys of inspiring natural splendor. Beautifully preserved historical structures, vestiges of a national industrial powerhouse a century ago.

This guide as well as its Google Maps counterpart, will be updated in May with details on the sponsor-themed awards of Plein Air West Reading 2025, which runs June 14-21. But that update, as well as this version, will have year-round relevance to ALL plein air artists, featuring places throughout the area favored by local artists. These are offered just as places to start—there is still much for all of us to discover in Berks County.

### **HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE**

1. Use this index to make a shortlist of promising spots.
2. If you don't have it already, download the Google Maps app to your phone or tablet. Go to <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/2/edit?mid=1SmTFxfPIFIKaaG1iTIkdBVc2u4QFEke&usp=sharing>
3. In the nav bar, you'll find much of the same information covered in this printed/PDF version.
4. Click on any icon in the nav bar or on the map for details, images and directions.

## **HISTORICAL SITES**

Each the Berks History Center selects 5 or 6 historical sites for artists to paint in pursuit of the Berks History Award. Most are available year-round for plein air painting:

- Maiden Creek Friends Meeting House - 847 W. Shore Drive, Shoemakersville, PA 19555
- Historic Dreibelbis Farm - 356 Hard Hill Road, Hamburg, PA 19526
- PA German Cultural Heritage Center, 22 Luckenbill Rd. (small one-room schoolhouse) Kutztown, PA 19530
- Kutztown Area Historical Society Museum (large 1892 Victorian schoolhouse). 212 S. White Oak St., Kutztown, PA 19530
- Kutztown Train Station - 232 Railroad Street, Kutztown, PA 19530
- Allegheny Aqueduct, Birdsboro
- Colebrookdale Railroad, Boyertown
- Greisemer's Mill Bridge, Oley
- Hopewell Furnace, Elverson
- Grimshaw Silk Mill, Reading
- Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead, Wyomissing
- Leesport Lockhouse
- Reading Railroad Heritage Museum, Hamburg
- Dreibelbis Bridge, Lenhartsville
- Joanna Furnace. Morgantown
- Beidler House & Mill, Birdsboro
- Pavilion from the Neversink Mountain Hotel (aka The Witches Hat)

### **ADDITIONAL HISTORIC SITES**

The Berks History Center has documented over 900 locations of historical significance around the county. Here are some additional sites as well as details on a few of the aforementioned:

## CANALS

- **Union Canal Lock #47** and lock history on **Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail**, Plum Creek, Leesport, PA 19533
- **Kelly's Lock**, 2820 River Rd, Reading, PA 19605

## RAILROADS & TROLLEYS

- Colebrookdale Railroad, 64 S Washington St., Boyertown 19512  
Beautifully restored station, vintage cars and operating rail service including two steam locomotives. Please use the brick walkways to walk around the train yard, and never cross the railroad tracks. Restroom trailer is at the end of Third Street, toward the track. Station is open weekdays 9-4.
- **Reiffon Trolley Stop**. Perkiomen Ave & E 36th St
- **Temple Trolley Stop Shelter**. 11th Ave & Park Ave, Muhlenberg Township, PA 19560
- Railroad Trestle at Ironstone Park. Boyertown, PA 19512
- **Existing Train Stations in Berks County**: Comprehensive List of Locations found at [west2k.com/pastations/berks.shtml](http://west2k.com/pastations/berks.shtml)
- **Swinging Bridge & Railroad Ruins** at Heritage Park at Canal Street
- **Geigertown Train Station** - Geigertown Central Railroad, 1396A Geigertown Rd, Birdsboro, PA 19508  
Great abandoned looking rail cars and trains etc near the road. Quiet rural location.
- **Outdoor Railyard Collections at Reading Railroad Heritage Museum**, 500 S. Third Street, Hamburg, PA 19526. Museum Admission: \$7, Check website for visitation details

## COVERED BRIDGES

- **Wertz's Covered (Red) Bridge**, Tulpehocken Rd, Reading, PA 19605, Located at the Berks Heritage Center. Longest covered bridge in Pennsylvania. Gruber Wagon Works is a historic structure that was relocated adjacent to the bridge when Blue Marsh dam was built and the pleasant valley flooded for Blue Marsh Lake. There is also a Pennsylvania Dutch Distelfink statue here, which is a stylized Pennsylvania Dutch bird, a familiar regional icon. Parking on either side of the bridge on Red Bridge road or Tulpehocken road. 3 possible paintings in one location.
- **Kutz's Mill Bridge**. Kutz Mill Rd, Kutztown, PA 19530
- **Pleasantville Bridge**. Covered Bridge Rd, Oley, PA 19547
- **Dreibelbis Covered Bridge**: Take Route 222 North from Reading to Moselem Springs. Turn left onto Route 662 and proceed past the golf course. Turn right onto Route 143 and follow this road through Virginville and eventually to the bridge. Some info about the bridge: <https://www.berkshistory.org/multimedia/articles/the-dreibelbis-covered-bridge/>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreibelbis\\_Station\\_Bridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreibelbis_Station_Bridge)

## INDUSTRY, ARCHITECTURE & MORE

- **Gring's Mill**. 2083 Tulpehocken Rd, Reading, PA 19610. County park with restrooms and many different vantage points on the Tulpehocken Creek, dam and spillway.
- **Berks History Center**. 940 Centre Ave. Reading, PA 19601. The heart of our history scene, with its own fascinating museum.
- Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead, 1700 Tulpehocken Rd, Wyomissing 19610. Beautiful restored homestead from the early 1700's. Park in the lot across Tulpehocken Rd. Paint at any time. Rest room available.
- **Mouns Jones House** (aka Old Swedes House). Oldest structure in Berks. (Check to make sure it's open). 31 Old Philadelphia Pike Douglassville, PA 19518
- **The Pagoda**. 98 Duryea Dr, Reading, PA 19602. Iconic landmark overlooking the city.

- **William Penn Memorial Fire Tower**. 621 Skyline Dr, Reading, PA 19606
- **Gruber Wagon Works**. 1102 Red Bridge Rd, Reading, PA 19605. Adjacent to Wertz's Tulpehocken covered bridge.
- **Conrad Weiser Homestead**. 28 Weiser Dr, Womelsdorf, PA 19567
- **Daniel Boone Homestead**. 400 Daniel Boone Rd, Birdsboro, PA 19508
- Allegheny Aqueduct, 1130 Old River Rd, Birdsboro 19508. This well-preserved landmark off Rt. 724 was built in 1824 to allow canal boats to cross over Angelica Creek. The stone arch bridge is 260+' long and nearly 80' wide. No rest room.
- **Hopewell Furnace**. 2 Mark Bird Lane, Elverson 19520. Artistic possibilities abound in this beautifully preserved and restored complex of this National Historic Site, which includes 14 structures and a working water wheel. Rest room available.
- **Grimshaw Silk Mill**, 1200 N. 11<sup>th</sup> St., Reading 19601. Rebuilt in 1890 after a tornado took the 2-year old building and 17 lives. Reopened as a silk mill, changed to manufacturing Freeman Shoes in the early 1900s, added to the National Register of Historical Sites in 1985, now an apartment building. No public restrooms.

## WATERWAYS

Berks County's stretch of the Schuylkill River Watershed covers nearly all of the county, including 3 lakes, countless ponds, and 40+ creeks that feed the river. <https://schuylkillriver.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SAN-Schuylkill-watershed-map-compressed.pdf>

Spots popular among local artists include:

- **Angelica Creek**. Sawmill Lot at Nolde or the Nature Place off Morgantown Road. Nice trails, creeks and convenient rest rooms at both.
- **Antietam Lake**. Parking lot on Angora Road, short walk downstream to the restored pump house and waterfall below the dam.
- **French Creek**. Lakes, creek, woods, boating & camping.
- **Manatawny Creek** (See Greisemer's Bridge)
- **Northkill Creek** (Old Forge Rd lot), gently cascading down from the Appalachian Trail.
- Lake Ontelaunee, Maiden Creek. Large dam, spillway and bridge at the intersection of Lake Shore and Bowers roads.
- **Schuylkill River**. A few of the many access points: West Hamburg Park, Kernville Dam, Jim Dietrich Park, Riverside Park, and Exeter Scenic River Trail.
- **Grings Mill**. Popular site for artists and strollers. Large parking lot, a couple hundred yards to the picturesque bridge with old stone mill, toll house and waterfall. Convenient rest rooms.
- **The Nature Place**. Home of Berks Nature Conservancy. Pond, creek, plentiful flora & fauna. Public rest rooms in the nature center.
- **Wyomissing Creek**. Popular 3-mile park extending west from the Museum Park in West Reading, with well-maintained trails and mature trees along the creek. Convenient parking near the Stone House across from YR club on Parkside drive and two other lots along Cambridge.
- **Nolde Forest**. Beautiful state environmental education center, with convenient parking, 11 miles of trails, two ponds, picturesque Tudor mansion and Watershed Trail. Maps at parking lots. Restroom near Sawmill Parking lot.
- **Antietam Lake Park**: Restored pump house with a lake view and a scenic waterfall at the same location.

- **Blue Marsh:** Several of the main access areas require a pass or paid parking, but you'll find free parking and good places to start at the Visitors Center, Water Street, State Hill Overlook, and Church Street (off Rt. 183).

## CITY OF READING

Mansions and monuments abound in **Centre Park Historic District**, which extends from the little park at the intersection of Centre Ave & Fifth St through Charles Evans Cemetery; and W-E from Centre Ave to Fifth St., both sides. [https://www.readingpa.gov/images/centre\\_dist\\_2018.jpg](https://www.readingpa.gov/images/centre_dist_2018.jpg)

Though currently somewhat rough at heart as well as around some of the edges, the City of Reading continues to offer healthy veins of awesome architecture, historical richness, beauty and charm.

- **Pagoda and the William Penn Fire Tower on Skyline Drive.** Sweeping vistas overlooking the city of Reading.
- **Riverfront Park:** Good access to the Schuylkill River, adjacent to the RACC campus.
- Charles Evans Cemetery (Historic Gatehouse located at 1119 Centre Ave. The historic Stirling hotel is directly across the street. Also historic Witch's Hat pavilion in the cemetery)
- **Norfolk Southern Reading Yard.** Located on North 6th Street and Railroad Street, this site was once the main station for the historic Reading Railroad of Monopoly board game fame, and once the largest corporation in the world. The decaying open air structures at this site have many backdrops of the city of Reading, Mount Penn, the fire tower and the Pagoda. No amenities.
- **City Park.** Hillside urban park with a bandshell as a centerpiece.
- **Canal Street.** A mix of industry and warehouses ranging from robust and rehabbed to abandoned.
- **Franklin Street Station.** Beautifully restored train terminal, now home to Saucony Creek Brewpub.
- **Brentwood Schuylkill River Trailhead.** Located at the intersection of Morgantown and Brentwood roads, the parking lot is a short walk from lot east on the trail to an old railroad bridge with views of the river on both sides and the city of Reading and Neversink Mountain to the north.

## FARMLANDS

Agriculture thrives throughout Berks. You'll find dairy and corn to be big here, and countless choices north, east and west of Reading. Wandering can be half the fun, but here are a few insights that could help you choose a direction.

- **Rodale Farm,** 611 Siegfriedale Rd, Kutztown, PA 19530. Major research center for this global leader in organic farming. Artists are welcome, must sign in at the Visitors Center.
- **Oley Valley.** Settled in the early 1700s, lots of well-preserved old stone homes and barns. The entire valley is on the National Registry of Historic Sites. 2 covered bridges within 2 miles of each other. Parking can be a challenge; but private property owners are normally friendly and accommodating.
- **Fleetwood-Kutztown.** Bountiful Amish farms between Fleetwood and Kutztown. The Echo Hill Market on Dryville Rd. is popular among natural food shoppers as well as locals (ever wonder how many different kinds of flour there are?), adjacent to a sprawling, hilly field, and has a restroom for customers.

- **Robesonia**: A mile north of Rt. 422 is a ridge overlooking a long valley with serpentine fields of crops. Great view, parking and shade at the cemetery on Big Spring Rd Fritztown Road west toward Lebanon. Great light late afternoon-evening.
- **Albany Township**: Between Hamburg and Kempton to the east are beautiful rolling fields and foothills up to the mountain range of the Appalachian Trail. Kempton itself offers a characterful hotel, mill and rail station. Legendary painter Ben Austrian, who around 1900 listed his studio locations as New York, Paris, and Kempton, is buried at nearby New Bethel Church.

## TOWNS & VILLAGES

The 100+ towns & villages in rural Berks average about 3 miles apart, with at least as many artistic treasures to be found in between them. The Google Maps version pinpoints a number of specific sites within these towns:

- **Hamburg**: The historic district, Carnegie library, and armory are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Also of potential artistic interest are West Hamburg Park, post office and St Johns Lutheran Church.
- **Boyertown**: In this bustling burg at the eastern corner of the county you'll find a medley of fine old architecture, pocket gardens, restored train yard with a steam locomotive, and a wonderful (yet little known) Museum of Historic Vehicles built between Reading and Philadelphia. From two cemeteries on the hill you'll find panoramic views of orchards and farms.

## OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST

- **Mid-Atlantic Air Museum**: located at Reading Airport, off Rte 183. Awesome collection of classic aircraft.
- **Neversink Mountain**. Park on the back lot on Klapperthal road next to Forest Hills cemetery. Hike uphill and cross the first foot bridge, continue and turn left at the next bridge. In less than a mile there is a sweeping overlook above the Schuylkill River and mountains to the south.
- **Hawk Mountain Sanctuary**. 1700 Hawk Mountain Road Kempton PA. A short hike leads to many mountaintop vistas. Close to quaint Wanamaker's general store.