Landmark Walking Tours

Distance: .7 miles
Begin: Liberty Pole Plaza
      (East Main Street and Franklin Street)
End: Liberty Pole Plaza

Optional: At location 8, you may shorten this tour to .5 miles.

Many iconic Rochester buildings, churches, and parks are part of this tour in the heart of downtown. During most of the 20th century, the center of Rochester’s downtown was its department stores, and while the stores are gone, some of the buildings survive. You will also visit one of Rochester’s most fabulous banks, a Romanesque Revival church, and a former church that is now a tranquil and unusual downtown park.
The Liberty Pole was designed by Rochester architect James H. Johnson and built in 1965. This modern steel sculpture is symbolic of earlier wooden liberty poles that stood on the site between 1846 and 1889. This 20th-century work is expressive of a Colonial American custom that originated in 1766, when the first liberty pole in America was raised in Manhattan to celebrate England’s repeal of the Stamp Act.

From the Liberty Pole, look south to the former Midtown Plaza site.

Midtown Plaza, designed by Victor Gruen Associates of Los Angeles, and built in 1962, was the nation’s first major urban shopping mall, and became a much-publicized early example of downtown redevelopment. Midtown comprised the interior of an entire city block and was developed atop several levels of underground public parking that connects existing buildings. Midtown was demolished in 2010.

Look left of Midtown to One East Avenue.

One East Avenue, built in 1962, was originally constructed for the Security Trust Company. It is now Fleet Bank. This striking example of 1960s architecture consists of a two-story glass-enclosed public banking facility, an adjoining 11-story tower, and an outdoor plaza. The public banking facility is notable for its imaginative roofline, glass walls, and Rochester artist John Menihan’s 130-foot-long mural, a symbolic tribute to the diversification of Monroe County’s economy. The Tower building, resting on stilts, is notable for its band of quartz aggregate and gray-tinted glass.

Looking left again, you will see two distinctive late-19th-century commercial buildings.
The Sibley Triangle Building, 20-26 East Avenue, at the southeast corner of E. Main Street and East Avenue, was designed by J. Foster Warner and built in 1897. Occupying a prominent site at the intersection of East Avenue and Main Street, this triangular five-story building was constructed by Hiram Sibley – realtor, banker, philanthropist and heir to the fortune amassed by his father, the builder of the Western Union Telegraph Company. Its Neo-Classical and Romanesque design includes large brick arches, a decorative cornice, and an arcade of Roman-arched windows on the fifth floor.

On the northeast corner of East Avenue and Stillson Street, at 52 East Avenue, is the Cutler Building, built in 1897. This Italianate-style office building was designed and owned by the famous Rochester architect and mayor, James G. Cutler. In 1882, Cutler patented the Cutler Mail Chute, used in virtually all of America’s early skyscrapers. The building features classical Italianate detailing, a bracketed cornice and copper-clad tower.

Across from the Cutler Building, at 45 East Avenue, is the office of the Greater Rochester Visitors Association. Stop in or visit them at www.visitrochester.com.

Cross Franklin Street to the corner of Liberty Pole Way.

The Temple Building was designed by Gordon & Kaelber and Carl R. Traver and built in 1925. Featuring pinnacles, pointed arches and decorative tracery, it is Rochester’s only example of a 20th-century Neo-Gothic skyscraper. The building is unusual in that it was developed for both religious and office use. The Second Baptist Church, founded in 1834, had a previous church on this site that no longer accommodated its needs. They built a new 14-story structure that served both religious and office functions and occupied it until 1965 when the Baptist congregation relocated to Brighton.

Directly across from the Temple Building is Charter One Bank.
Charter One Bank, 40 Franklin Street, was designed by McKim, Mead and White of New York with J. Foster Warner of Rochester and built in 1929. This outstanding example of 20th-century Byzantine architecture exemplified the traditional banking house “temple of commerce” theme. The restrained exterior belies the grandeur of the interior glass wall mosaics, marble pavement mosaics, decoratively painted wood-offered ceiling, and monumental Rouge Antique marble columns. The painted ceiling and the mosaics are the work of Ezra Winter, the American muralist whose work also decorates the Eastman Theatre interior.

Continue down Liberty Pole Way until you reach the intersection of Pleasant Street. Look right on Pleasant Street to see the Lutheran Church of the Reformation.

The Lutheran Church of the Reformation (111 N. Chestnut Street), built in 1900, was designed by William Brockett, a nephew and onetime partner in the architectural firm of A.J. Warner. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the brick and stone church is architecturally significant as a fine example of Romanesque Revival design influenced by the German building tradition known as “Rundbogenstil.” Established by German immigrants, this congregation continues to offer services in German.

Across the street, the corner of N. Chestnut and Grove streets is Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church, 60 Grove Street. Built c. 1850, this Romanesque Revival building was originally the First German Lutheran Church and featured a tall central spire above the front gable.

At this point you may choose to continue the regular tour or take a shortened route.

To continue: Continue on Liberty Pole Way, follow the 90 degree turn left until you reach Andrews Street. On the corner is Harro East.

To shorten: Turn left (west) on Pleasant Street until you reach St. Joseph’s Park on your right. Skip to number 16.

Harro East, 400 Andrews Street, is located on the south side of Andrews Street at the corner of Liberty Pole Way. Built as the Jewish Young Men’s & Women’s Association, the “JY” opened its doors in 1936. Today, the triangle-shaped building, now Harro East, private athletic club, with office space on the top floors, and a theater on the main level, attractively anchors this corner of downtown. The Georgian Revival style building, designed by architect Sigmund Firestone, features decorative woodwork, interior plaster and exterior stonework. In the 1970s the “JY,” now called the Jewish Community Center, moved to Brighton and the building was sold to the Freddie L. Thomas Foundation.

Look down east down Andrews Street to the neighboring building, the Fire Department headquarters.
Joseph P. Flynn designed the Rochester Fire Department headquarters on the corner of North and Andrews streets with its stylized Art Deco carvings of firemen at the entrance. The two buildings that make up the headquarters were built from 1935 to 1937.

Now turn left (west) on Andrews Street and look across to Schiller Park.

Schiller Park

Originally named Franklin Square when laid out in the early 19th century, Schiller Park was one of the first neighborhood parks established in the city, much larger than the small tree-lined plot you see today. Walk into the park for a view of a limestone statue of late 18th century German poet, Frederich Schiller.

Beyond the park and across the inner loop, you can see the U.S. Post Office Building, on the northeast corner of Joseph Avenue. It was built as the city's main post office in 1933. This block-long, limestone building was designed by the Rochester architectural firm, Gordon and Kaelber, as a W.P.A. project. Its design features a distinctive use of innovative decorative ideas, combining streamlined Classic and notable Art Deco details executed in brass, marble and oak. A branch post office since the late 1970s, the building still retains its handsome decorative interior and exterior features.

Continue on Andrews Street until you reach the Community Bible Church on your right.

Community Bible Church

One of Rochester's first German Baptist churches, this Romanesque Revival-style edifice was built in 1870. Today, the building is the oldest surviving Baptist church in the city.

Look next door to the Salmon-Nusbaum Building.
Salmon-Nusbaum Building

Salmon-Nusbaum Building (148 N. Clinton Avenue) is located at the northeast corner of Andrews Street (circa 1876). The 1877 History of Monroe County describes this building as “one of the finest business blocks in the city.” The Second Empire-style building is one of Rochester’s most interesting Victorian-era structures and remains virtually unchanged from its original appearance. The handsome exterior includes the original cast-iron storefront and carved stone lintels and sills. Note the slate mansard roof, corbelled chimneys and ornamental brackets.

From here, look right down Bittner Street to the Salem United Church of Christ.

Salem United Church of Christ

Distinguished by its twin towers and arched windows, this Romanesque Revival-style church, founded by Germans and designed by architect Charles Coats, was built in 1873 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. During a 1929 renovation, the tall spires were removed and the present brick facade was installed.

Now look across the street to the Kirstein Building.

The Kirstein Building

The Kirstein Building, 242 Andrews Street, is located at the corner of Bittner Street. Built in 1910 for the Kirstein and Sons Optical Company, this utilitarian, wedge-shaped building in the Chicago style is characterized by large rectangular windows and little exterior decoration.

Turn left (south) on North Clinton Avenue until you reach the intersection of Pleasant Street. On your left is St. Joseph’s Park.
St. Joseph’s Park

St. Joseph’s Park is located inside the remains of what was the city’s oldest Catholic Church, destroyed in 1974 by a disastrous fire. The church was built in 1843 by German immigrants and became the mother church of nine other German parishes in western New York. The bell tower was constructed in 1909. The park was created by determined citizens and institutions who felt that the distinctive tower was an irreplaceable feature of the Rochester cityscape. Now, with its enclosed courtyard and fountain, the Landmark Society-owned St. Joseph’s Park provides a welcome quiet space downtown. Opened in 1980, the park renovation was designed by Handler/Grosso Architects.

Regular Tour Route: Look to the opposite corner for the Michaels-Sterns Building.

Shortened Tour Route: Continue on Pleasant Street until you reach North Clinton Avenue. Look to the opposite corner for the Michaels-Sterns Building.

Michaels-Sterns Building

The Michaels-Sterns Building, 87 N. Clinton Avenue, was built in 1893. This building is one of the survivors of the once diversely built-up garment district that occupied the area between N. Clinton Avenue and St. Paul Street. Built during the era when clothing manufacturing was Rochester’s most important industry, this building housed the manufacturing, office, wholesale, and retail functions of the Michaels-Stern Company, a ready-to-wear clothing business from the 1890s until 1972. The Michaels-Stern Building is designed in the Romanesque Revival style, with Beaux Arts detailing around the front entrance, corner quoins and cornice. With its eclectic use of stylistic elements, the Michaels-Stern Building is the only surviving commercial structure designed by the Rochester firm of Nolan, Nolan and Stern.

Continue south on North Clinton Avenue until you reach East Main Street. On your left is Sibley Centre.

Sibley Centre

Sibley Centre, 228 E. Main Street, between N. Clinton Avenue and Franklin Street, was designed by J. Foster Warner and built in 1905 as a major downtown department store. Construction of the present Sibley’s started after a disastrous fire destroyed the Sibley, Lindsay, and Curr Company’s former store. In 1911, the building was extended to Franklin Street; six stories were added to this addition in 1926 to create the Sibley Tower Building, the city’s largest office building at the time. The imposing, long-cherished landmark is a handsome example of the Chicago School of architecture. Constructed of slender Roman-style bricks with granite trim, the clarity and simplicity of its design was very progressive for its time. Only the landmark clock tower, with its copper dome, displays ornamental detail. Sibley’s Place, formerly Sibley’s Department Store, closed in 1989; in 1992, the Damon City Center opened here as the downtown campus on Monroe Community College. Today, in addition to the college, the building houses offices, and retail establishments.

Turn left on East Main Street for another view of the Sibley Center and to return to Liberty Pole Plaza and conclude the tour.