Center City Firehouses

A SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR BY PHILADELPHIA NEIGHBORHOOD
Special Thanks to

Mike Legeros
30-minute Walk

1. OLD LADDER 5
2. HARMONY / FRANKLIN COMPANY
3. ENGINE 1 / LADDER 5
4. SCHUYLKILL HOSE COMPANY
5. OLD ENGINE 4
Start on 16th Street between Catherine and Fitzwater Streets. Look to your right for a brick building with large, red doors and two large windows on the second floor.

This was the home for Ladder 5 in 1885. Ladder 5 was moved to 2210 Market Street with Engine 43, so the station could be renovated. During 1918, Ladder 5 moved back to 752 South 16th Street. Ladder 5 moved to 711 South Broad Street (their current station) with Engine 1 on December 15, 1964. Prior to this move, Ladder 5 was the last single ladder station in the city of Philadelphia. This building is now a private residence.

In 1900, numbers replaced letters and later in 1952, the nomenclature for the Truck Companies changed from Truck to Ladder. So, Ladder 5 was once called Truck E.
Checkpoint 2
Franklin / Harmony Company
Franklin Hose Company No. 28 was established in 1838, and operated East of Broad Street. The Franklin had a new house built for them in 1849 here at 730-32 South Broad Street. This structure was built by Samuel Sloan as the volunteer firehouse. Sloan was a Philadelphia-based architect in the mid-19th century. He specialized in Italianate villas and country houses, churches, and institutional buildings. In 1867, the Franklin Hose purchased the charter of an older fire company and changed its name to the Harmony Fire Company No. 6.
The new Harmony Fire Company operated as a steam fire engine company from 1867 to 1871 when the paid Philadelphia Fire Department was formed. The original Harmony Fire Company was founded in 1784, and last operated on Arch Street around 8th St. When the city consolidated in 1855, they refused to join the newly organized Philadelphia Fire Department manned by volunteers and retired.

Watercolor images by Granville Perkins, painted around the 1860’s.
When the City of Philadelphia established a municipal fire department in 1871, volunteer fire companies were disbanded, including Harmony Fire Company. By 1887, the Philadelphia Police Department took possession of the building for use as a patrol station. In the mid-1890s, it became a starch works (or laundromat.) It was last used as a warehouse and residence. Since 1991, the building has been utilized by the Brandywine Workshop, the multicultural print arts organization. This organization has since renovated much of the building, including facade restoration work in 2008. This building is a pristine structure that was added to the National Register of Historic Places due, in great part, to its survival as, according to the nomination,

“the best preserved and architecturally the most imposing of the city’s early firehouses.”
Checkpoint 3

Engine 1 / Ladder 5
Cross Broad Street. Look to your right for a building with the words “Engine 1” and “Ladder 5” on the front.

Engine 1 was organized March 15, 1871 in the quarters formerly occupied by Delaware Fire Company 4 on South Street above 18th Street. On December 15, 1964 Engine 1 moved to a new station at 711 S. Broad Street. Ladder 5 moved into the new station the same day from their single ladder house at 752 S. 16th Street. Engine 1 was one of seven companies disbanded on January 5, 2009 because “they were no longer needed”. Engine 1 was one of the four companies that was re-opened on November 23, 2019.
On June 12, 1973, a tragic and spectacular 8-alarm fire occurred along Washington Avenue in South Philadelphia. An explosion blew out the cinder block walls of the two-story section. Firefighters working in Kimball Street were flung against the dwellings on the opposite side of the street and were buried under the falling walls and debris. All of the members of Ladder 5 were injured in the explosion. Two firefighters were killed by falling masonry: Fireman Robert F. Malley, Engine 24, and Fireman John M. Welsh, Ladder 5.
Checkpoint 4

Schuylkill Hose Company
The Schuylkill Hose Company No. 24 was organized on December 9, 1833. This three-story building was built for them in 1834 and was occupied until 1871 when the paid Philadelphia Fire Department was established. The two top floors were rented to private schools and were used as meeting rooms. The company, whose motto was “We labor for the public good,” was also known as the Schuylkill Hose and Hook and Ladder Company.

Head North on Broad Street, then turn right onto Locust Street. Walk past 13th Street, then look to your left for a tall, narrow building with large red doors.
Checkpoint 5
Old Engine 4
Engine 4 was formed in 1871, and moved to this location in 1898. A noteworthy fire occurred on May 4-5, 1928 when the entire house was out of service due to smoke inhalation while fighting a large fire at 6th and Market St. The firehouse operated until 1984, when it was disbanded by the city. Firefighters at the station learned it was being closed shortly after they had responded to a 9-alarm blaze in Center City. The building is now home to a bar and restaurant called “LADDER 15.”

Head West on Locust Street, then turn right onto 13th Street. Turn left onto Sansom Street. Between 15th and 16th Streets, look for a black building with signs for “LADDER 15.”
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