Gulf Tower
Trowbridge & Livingston (New York), architects; E. P. Mellon, associate architect, 1912
This 44-story tower, originally constructed for the Gulf Oil Corporation, was the tallest in Pittsburgh until 1970. The architects went down 90 feet to find a proper footing for their great tower, then raised it in a sober Modernistic manner that began and ended with allusions to Classical architecture: a colossal doorway with a 50-ton granite entablature on Seventh Avenue and a limestone stepped-back pyramidal top that recalls the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus and now serves as the KDKA Weather Beacon, when illuminated at night.

Joseph F. Weis, Jr. U.S. Courthouse
Trowbridge & Livingston (New York), architects, with James A. Wetmore (Washington, D.C.), 1912
During a $68-million renovation in 2004–05, the exterior stonework was cleaned, six new courtrooms were added in the original building light wells, and an atrium was constructed to allow natural light to illuminate the new third-floor lobby space and historic fourth-floor courtrooms.

U.S. Steel Tower
Harrison & Abramovitz (New York), architects, 1971
At 841 feet high, U.S. Steel Tower was the tallest building between New York and Chicago when completed. (In 1987 Philadelphia’s One Liberty Place Building at 945 feet became the first to surpass it.) U.S. Steel Tower has an exposed frame of Cor-Ten weathering steel (a U.S. Steel patent).

1. Hotel Monaco
2. BNY Mellon Green
3. BNY Mellon Center
4. Allegheny County Courthouse
5. City-County Building
6. Grant Building
7. One Oxford Centre
8. Frick Building
9. Union Trust Building
10. Mellon Square
11. Hotel Monaco
12. The Residences at the Historic Alcoa Building
13. Allegheny HYP Club
14. Smithfield United Church
15. Verizon Building
16. Koppers Building
17. Gulf Tower
19. U.S. Steel Tower
20. First Lutheran Church

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GRANT STREET & MELLON SQUARE

A self-guided walking tour, compliments of the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation © 2017

STARTING LOCATION
Grant Street near Sixth Avenue, at the Omni William Penn Hotel entrance

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Grant Street & Mellon Square

There's nothing like walking to get you in touch with a place. You see, hear, notice, explore, and discover.
—Laurence A. Glasco, author, historian, and PHLF Trustee

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Downtown Pittsburgh and Oakland: Guided Walking Tours
Every Friday, May through October
• Two different free walking tours are offered each month: one from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. and another from Noon to 1 p.m. Join us for one, or both.
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Grant Street & Mellon Square

Pittsburgh especially is a city of monuments to its great industrialists who left behind not only steel mills, factories and banks, but also a number of huge buildings which perpetuate their names. Frick, Carnegie, Oliver and Phipps resound in the city's architectural as well as its financial annals. Like the princes of the Renaissance, the masters of these great fortunes loved to build. In steel, marble and granite is memorialized much of the history of Pittsburgh's Age of the Moguls.

—James D. Van Trump, “The Scyscraper as Monument” (The Charette; 43:4, April 1963)

With its concentration of major historic buildings and modern skyscrapers, Grant Street is Downtown Pittsburgh's showcase thoroughfare. In 2012, the American Planning Association named Grant Street one of America's ten “Great Streets,” because of its exceptional character. Grant Street takes its name from Grant's Hill—once 60 feet high and occupying the area between Oliver and Fourth avenues. Grant's Hill was named for British Major James Grant, who was defeated there by the French and Native Americans in September 1758. Two months later, on November 25, 1758, British General John Forbes succeeded in wresting control of this area from the French. Forbes named Pittsburgh in honor of British statesman Sir William Pitt the Elder, who devised the military strategy so the French had to retreat. Forbes named the hill opposite the fort after his Secretary of War, but in the legal sense, the British renamed it Grant's Hill.

1. Omni William Penn Hotel


This classic big-city hotel is distinguished by the Art Deco Urban Room on the 17th floor. Deep light courts (easily noticed from Mellon Square) allow the maximum number of guest rooms to have natural ventilation and outdoor views. During a $22 million renovation in 2004, many of the building's original elements were restored.

2. BNY Mellon Green

Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann, architects, and MTR Landscape Architects, 2002

Privately owned but open to the public, this greenspace gives a campus feel to the BNY Mellon Financial Center complex. The fountain was designed by Cindy Tyler of MTR. The granite monoliths and fountain symbolize the rigidity of the city surrounded by the fluidity of the three rivers. A tree-lined promenade of rustic terrazzo and granite paving leads to one of four Downtown “T” (transit) stations.

3. BNY Mellon Center

Welton Becket Associates (Los Angeles, later New York), architects, 1983

The steel-plate walls help brace the frame of this 54-story skyscraper, respectfully designed to pay homage to Henry Hobson Richardson's Allegheny County Courthouse.

4. Allegheny County Courthouse

Henry Hobson Richardson (Brookline, Mass.), architect, 1884–88; alterations

The Allegheny County Courthouse and former jail are among Pittsburgh's most famous buildings. Richardson died in 1886, two years before the courthouse was finished. On his deathbed Richardson is reported to have said: “If they honor me for the pigmy things I have already done, what will they say when they see Pittsburgh finished.” The courthouse and former jail are his most impressive surviving buildings. The jail was renovated between 1999 and 2000 to house the Allegheny County family and juvenile courts.

5. City-County Building

Henry Hornbostel, with Edward B. Lee, architects, 1917

Hornbostel (NYC) won the 1904 competition for Carnegie Technical Schools (now CMU). More than 50 of the buildings and monuments he designed for Pittsburgh remain.

6. Grant Building

Henry Hornbostel and Eric Fisher Wood, architects, 1930

This building has lost some exterior detailing and inner space, but its neon canopy continues to flash PJ-T-TS-B UR-G-H in Morse code for the benefit of aviators.

7. One Oxford Centre

Hellmuth, Obata, Kassabaum (New York), architects, 1983

This 46-story skyscraper was built as a cluster of octagons to maximize the number of corner offices.

8. Frick Building

D. H. Burnham & Co. (Chicago), architects, 1902

Henry Clay Frick made a number of major real-estate investments that resulted in construction of a close-set group of buildings in the Grant Street area: the Frick Building, the Frick Annex (now the Allegheny Building), Union Arcade, and the first part of the William Penn Hotel. In the Frick Building, the earliest of these, he created a personal monument and the location of his own office. The tall new building that was finished in 1902 put an end to the 14-year dominance of the Pittsburgh skyline by the courthouse directly across the street. Look inside for a marble bust of Frick by Malvina Hoffman, bronze lions by A. Phimister Proctor, and Fortune, in glass, by John LaFarge.

9. Union Trust Building

Henry Horn John Oestler, architect, 1917

Note the roof. Flemish Gothic realized in virtuosic terra cotta work. Originally called the Union Arcade, there were 240 shops, facing two-four open arcade spaces, and about 700 offices. Other offices and retail spaces prevailed. See the damascene interior space: an 11-story atrium with a stained glass skylight. A $100 million renovation is underway.

10. Mellon Square

Mitchell & Ritchey, architects; Simonds & Simonds, landscape architects, 1935

The Mellon family donated a block of Downtown real estate in 1949 to create this one-acre park with terrazzo walks, fountain cascades, and granite benches above a six-level underground parking garage. Mellon Square was the world's first urban space to incorporate a park, shops, and underground garage in one design. A fountain on the North Shore along the Allegheny River was the site of Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. Mellon Square also serves as a fine architecture-viewing platform. Notice the Henry W. Oliver Building (D. H. Burnham & Co., 1910) that terminates in a pilastered arcade; the Park Building (George B. Post, 1896) with crouching figures of Atlas beneath its cornice; and the former Mellon Bank building (Trowbridge & Livingston, 1924) whose magnificent interior was destroyed for the short-lived Lord & Taylor's. The PNC Financial Services Group has renovated the building for employee offices.

11. Hotel Monaco

MacClure & Sahr, architects, 1902–03; enlarged by Joseph E. Kunz, architect, 1924

Hotel Monaco brings new life to the classically inspired Philadelphia Contributions Company Building, better known as the James H. Reed Building. The interior is a welcome surprise, full of contemporary style and connections to Pittsburgh's history.

12. The Residences at the Historic Alcoa Building

Harrison & Abramowitz (New York), architects, 1953

Originally constructed for Alcoa, this corporate headquarters building was turned into a retirement community to show off as many applications of aluminum as possible. Here, aluminum siding made its debut in high-style construction. In 1998, Alcoa constructed a new building on the North Shore along the Allegheny River and donated this building to serve as the headquarters for various nonprofit organizations. More recently, the skyscraper has been transformed into the residences of apartments in the upper stories, with offices and retail below.

13. Allegheny HYP Club

Enlarged by Edward B. Lee, architect, 1930

1890-period workers' houses were remodeled to provide a gracious courtyard and cozy interiors for what was originally the Harvard-Yale-Princeton Club. The club members are now open to graduates from any college or university. The rose window of the Smithfield United Church makes an impressive backdrop ornament to this picturesque scene.

14. Smithfield United Church

Henry Horn John Oestler, architect, 1925

Hornbostel finished off an eclectic Gothic composition with an openwork spire that represents a very early architectural use of aluminum. The sanctuary is open on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. See the statue of Lincoln in stained glass.

15. Verzon Building

Alden & Harlow, 1935 addition; James T. Windrim (Philadelphia), 1915, 1923, 1932 additions

This building complex, begun in red brick c. 1890 by Frederick John Ostertag for the Bell Telephone Company, was greatly expanded with several additions faced in stone and brick. The building façade has been beautifully restored. A one-story covered walkway known as Strawberry Way, with shallow vaults in green-and-cream Guastavino tile and limestone piers, is not only a handsome space in itself, but frames the view of the old and tiny houses opposite.

16. Koppers Building

Grage, Anderson, Predoelt & White (Chicago), architects, 1929

The successor firm to D. H. Burnham & Co. designed a unique Art Deco headquarters for a progressive industrial firm. The tall lobby spaces within the limestone building feature colored marbles and ornamented bronzework. The crowning chateau roof, being made of copper, can be taken apart and carried by truck. The glass house is a doll's house version of the whole building, roof included.