Historic Walking Tour

A self-guided tour through the heart of downtown York



Key

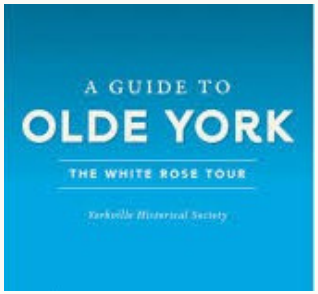
Route Overview:

Start: McCelvey Center

End: Railroad Depot

Loop: Short walk back to McCelvey Center

1. **McCelvey Center**
2. **Winter Circus Quarters**
3. **Church of the Good Shepherd**
4. **Trinity United Methodist Church**
5. **Historic Courthouse**
6. **The Brandon House**
7. **The Yorkville Enquirer Building**
8. **Railroad Depot**
9. **Old Settlers Cemetery**



This historic walking tour was created in partnership with the Yorkville Historical Society, celebrating the rich history of our community.

MAIN STREET CITY of YORK

Downtown York Historic Walking Tour History

The historical information featured in this tour is drawn from *A Guide to Olde York: The White Rose Tour*, published by the Yorkville Historical Society in 2020.

1. **McCelvey Center - 212 E. Jefferson Street:**

The McCelvey Center stands on the original site of the Yorkville Female College, founded in 1852. In 1889, it became the Yorkville Graded School—one of the first public schools in South Carolina.

After a fire in 1900, the building was rebuilt in 1902 and later renamed York Graded School when the town became York. Longtime principal George C. McCelvey led the school from 1912 to 1948, leaving a lasting impact on the community.

Renamed in his honor in 1973, the school served students until 1987. Today, the McCelvey Center operates as a historical archive under the Culture & Heritage Museums of York County and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2023.

2. **Circus Winter Quarters - Trinity Street:**

From 1929 to 1945, York served as the winter home for the Barnett Brothers Circus—one of the first in the country to travel by truck rather than train.

The building at Jefferson and Trinity Streets, constructed in 1937, was part of the circus's winter quarters, which spanned two city blocks and included a second building across the street.
At its peak, this area was filled with performers, animals, and activity—offering a glimpse into one of York's most unique chapters.

3. **Church of the Good Shepherd - 108 E. Liberty Street:**

Established in 1852, the Church of the Good Shepherd built its sanctuary in 1855 at a cost of $5,000. Early Episcopal families helped lay the foundation for the parish, including Dr. J.M. Lowry and William Latta.

Dr. Lowry donated part of his land for the church, while Mr. Latta contributed five hundred Mexican silver dollars to cast the church bell. The bell is still in use today.

4. **Trinity United Methodist Church - 22 E. Liberty Street :**

Organized in 1824, Trinity Methodist began with a small church built in 1826 on College Street. As the congregation grew, land was purchased on East Liberty Street in 1890, and this Gothic Revival–style church was completed in 1891 at a cost of $6,000.

Trinity Methodist was part of the Methodist Episcopal, South denomination and is recognized as the oldest church of that tradition in York County.

5. **Historic Courthouse - 2 South Congress Street:**

This site has served as York County's courthouse location since the original village plan, with four courthouses built here over time. The first, a log structure, was built in 1786, followed by a brick courthouse in the early 1800s.

A third courthouse, designed by Robert Mills—best known for the Washington Monument—was completed in 1825. As York grew during the textile boom, a larger courthouse was needed, leading to the construction of the current building between 1914 and 1915.

After closing for renovations in 2011, the building reopened in 2016 and now serves as a county administrative center.

6. **Brandon House - 36 N. Congress Street:**

Located on Lot 37 of the 1786 village plan, the Brandon House has a long and evolving history. The property was purchased by John Zurcher in 1856, but the original home was destroyed by fire in 1870.

In 1871, Zurcher rebuilt the house you see today. Over the years, it has served as a residence, bakery, candy kitchen, and jewelry shop—reflecting the changing needs of the community.

Restored in 1985, the home was later named for the Brandon family, who owned it for over four decades.

7. **Yorkville Enquirer Building - 67 N. Congress Street:**

In 1855, Lewis M. Grist and his partners founded the Yorkville Enquirer, which became a well-respected newspaper across the region. The original wood-frame building was destroyed by fire in 1890 and rebuilt in 1891 as the brick structure you see today.

The building housed printing equipment in the basement, with offices and storage on the upper floors. The newspaper later moved to other locations but remained a local staple for generations before ending publication in 2015.

8. **Historic Railroad Depot - 23 E. Liberty Street:**

Built in 1901, this depot served as a passenger and freight station for the Carolina and Northwestern Railway. The site once included a large platform, along with nearby cotton warehouses and coal storage.

The railroad was later absorbed into the Southern Railway around 1940 and continued operating until 1974.

In later years, the building housed the Greater York Chamber of Commerce. Today, it serves as municipal offices for the City of York.

9. **Trinity United Methodist Cemetery (Old Settlers Cemetery) - 19 College Street:**

One of the earliest burial grounds in York, Trinity Cemetery contains graves dating from the mid-1800s. The one-acre lot was purchased by Trinity United Methodist Church in 1845.

The original Trinity church, built in 1822, once stood nearby between the cemetery and East Jefferson Street. Today, the cemetery remains a historic site under the care of Trinity United Methodist Church.