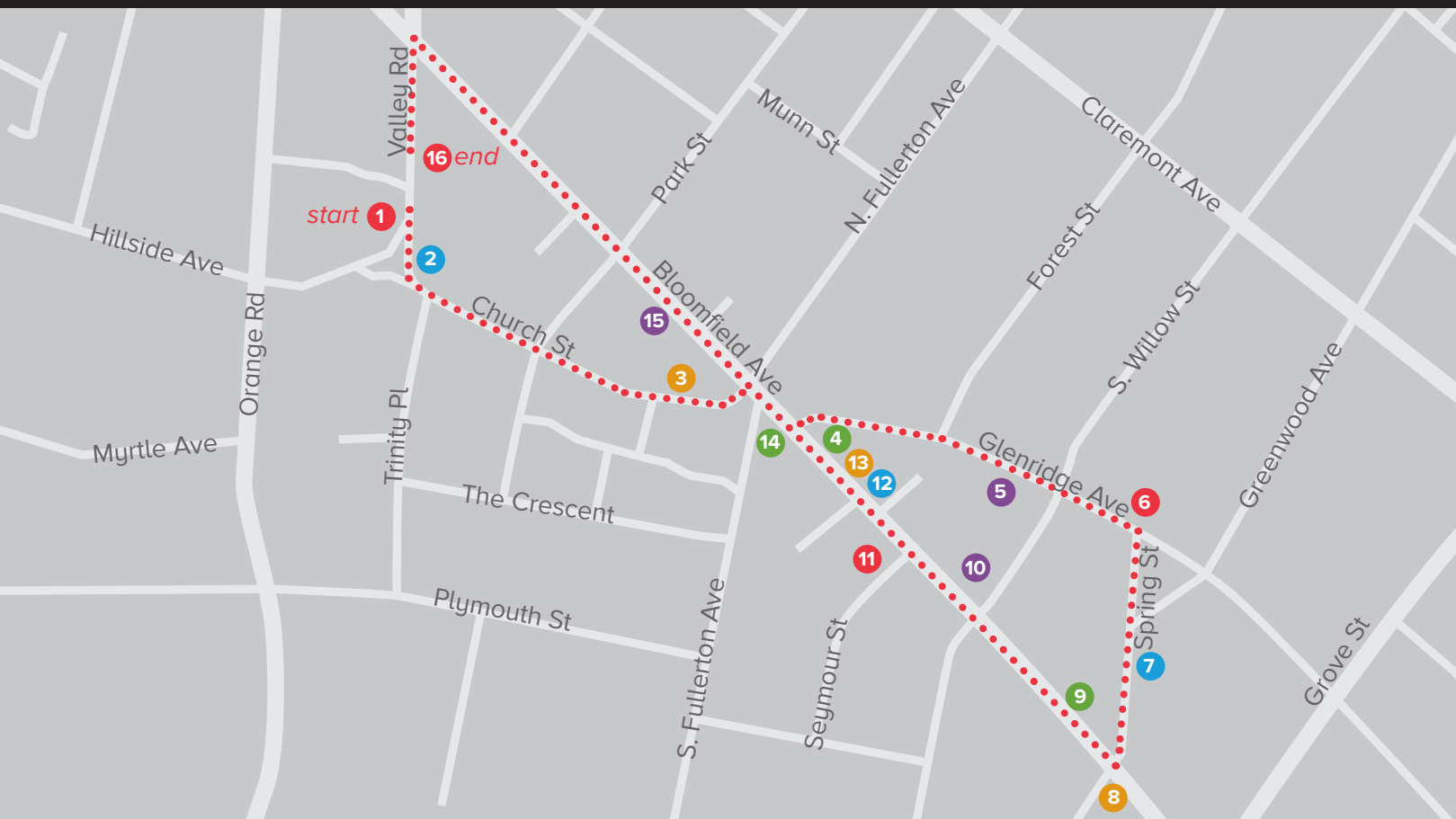


MONTCLAIR TOWN CENTER 1.25 MILES

A walk through an historic downtown



The first commercial district in town, Montclair Town Center's earliest commercial building was a sawmill built in 1695, a little east of today's Lackawanna Plaza. Bloomfield Avenue was carved out as the Newark Pompton Turnpike in 1810, connecting Newark to the farmers further west via a smooth, new toll road. By the end of the 1800s, tracks were laid on Bloomfield Avenue, and horse and carriages vied for space on the road with coal-powered trolley cars. Masonry buildings replaced woodframe homes and the commercial district was born.

Begin at the corner of Church Street and Valley Road.

1 THE OLD PRIMARY SCHOOL, 1860 22 Valley Road

Currently housing Montclair's Board of Education, this Italianate style building is the town's oldest school building. After the railroads came to town in 1856 and 1873, the population boomed and more schools were needed. Originally a grammar school, it served as high school from 1866 to 1893 and became an administrative building in 1909. A belfry was removed in 1924.

2 THE FORMER CARNEGIE LIBRARY, 1904 Church Street and Valley Road

Wealthy steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie donated millions to build more than 1,600 free public libraries throughout America, including two in Montclair – this one and the Bellevue Avenue branch. Built by architect John Howard, it is one of the few Prairie style buildings in town. The old Munn Tavern (#16) was relocated from this site to make way for the library.

Head east down Church Street, stop at South Fullerton Avenue.

3 CHURCH STREET

Church Street was named for the old First Presbyterian Church, which stood here until its demolition in 1920. During the Revolutionary War, General Washington's troops camped here as they planned a surprise attack on Staten Island that never happened. The Church Street shopping district was born in the 1920s and 1930s. The Mission-style Hinck building, at the intersection of Bloomfield, Church, and South Fullerton was built in 1921.

Cross Bloomfield Avenue, the cross North Fullerton Avenue.

4 THE FORMER MONTCLAIR SAVINGS BANK, 1924 441 Bloomfield Avenue

Countless children opened their first passbook savings accounts at the Montclair Savings Bank, the first bank in town. This Neoclassic style building is the third structure on the site. The Hooe family, one of the first African American middle class families in Montclair, owned a newsstand here in the late 19th century.

Walk down Glenridge Avenue.

5 GLENRIDGE AVENUE

You're walking along one of the oldest roads in town, aptly known as "Old Road" for years. This road was the main thoroughfare between Newark and the farms and villages in the west until the Newark Pompton Turnpike (Bloomfield Avenue) was built. As you pass 208 Glenridge Avenue, notice the map painted on the side of the building. Find Old Road and trace its route as it meanders along Church Street, over to Claremont Avenue, and into Verona.

6 THE GEYER FAMILY BRANCH OF THE YMCA, 2003 159 Glenridge Avenue

Although this building is new, the site was the original location of Israel Crane's home built in 1796. He was a descendant of Montclair's earliest English settlers and became a prominent businessman. In 1920, the YWCA purchased the home. It became a social center and boarding house for several generations of African American women in Montclair. Although the Crane house was moved to 110 Orange Road in 1965, this site remained a YWCA until 2003, when the YWCA purchased it and built this building.

Turn right on Spring Street towards Bloomfield Avenue.

7 LACKAWANNA STATION, 1913 291 Bloomfield Avenue

The first railroad station on this site was a utilitarian wooden building, the second was more substantial, and then young architect William Botsford designed this Beaux Arts masterpiece. When the building was dedicated on June 28, 1913, a town holiday was declared. Botsford, however, did not attend because he had died on the Titanic. Note the brick structure that looks like a fountain– it's a water trough for horses as they waited for commuters to come off the train. A new train station was built in the 1980s.

8 FORMER MULLEN'S LIVERY, 1884–1885 290-292 Bloomfield Avenue

In days of old, you'd get off the train, head to the livery, and catch the stagecoach or rent a horse and carriage to get where you were going. The low-pitched roof and clipped gable are distinctive features and common in other 19th century liveries. In the mid-20th century, it became the Sterington House, a nightclub that catered to the African American community. Many jazz greats, including Duke Ellington, played here.

Turn right on Bloomfield Avenue, heading west.

9 CRAWFORD BUILDING, 1892 295-301 Bloomfield Avenue

This eclectic Queen Anne and Romanesque building has a rich history. See the People's Bank sign engraved above the first floor? People's Bank was organized, owned, and used by Montclair's African American community when mortgages were withheld from minority populations. In the mid-20th century, it became a restaurant, Casa di Cappuccino. Rumor has it liquor was stored in the bank vault.

10 377 BLOOMFIELD AVENUE, 1900

Many businesses have occupied this space over the years. In the 1950s, it was the home of Jerry's Dresses, one of the first African American owned clothing stores.

11 WELLMONT THEATER, 1921 398-408 Bloomfield Avenue

One of three theaters permitted to operate in Montclair in the 1920s, the Wellmont staged live performances, but converted when "talkies" came into vogue. Originally, you'd enter this Georgian Revival style building under a grand marquee on Bloomfield Avenue and could go to a ballroom on the top floor. Thomas Edison was one of its notable patrons.

12 415 BLOOMFIELD AVENUE, EARLY 1900S

In 1905, Alice Hooe Foster, the first African American woman to graduate from Montclair High School, and her sister Grace Hooe purchased this building and operated a hair salon at street level. The upper level became known as Hooe Hall, a popular location for social events for Montclair's growing Black population.

13 MADISON BUILDING, 1912 427 Bloomfield Avenue



15 CLAIRIDGE THEATER, 1922 486 Bloomfield Avenue

The Clairidge was a small, opulent theater with a Wurlitzer organ to accompany silent movies. Like other theaters in town, originally it had segregated spaces for its African American customers.

Turn left on Valley Road.

16 MUNN TAVERN, 1802-1808 17 Valley Road

The old Munn Tavern, built in the Dutch Federal style, is tucked behind the former Valley Road Covenant Church building. Moved here in 1899, it served as a tavern, post office, and public library.