

# Bridgewater Historic District



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The Bridgewater Historic District was listed on the [National Register](#) of Historic Places in 1996. Portions of the text below were adapted from a copy of the original nomination document. [1] Adaptation copyright © 2008, The Gombach Group.

## Description

The eastern boundary of the historic district is the Beaver River, except at the southeast corner of the district, where the boundary extends across the river into the [Borough of Rochester](#). This extension is made to include the Bridgewater Bridge (a steel truss road bridge) and a mid-nineteenth century canal lock with an associated submerged canal dam, both structures that contribute to the significance of the historic district (the extension includes no other sections of Rochester). Among the contributing resources in the district are 97 buildings, mostly two-and-one-half-story houses, as well as commercial buildings concentrated along Bridge Street; one early-twentieth-century industrial complex; two former school buildings; and four churches. Most of the houses are typical examples of nineteenth century and turn-of-the-century residential architecture, largely vernacular in character but with elements of stylistic detailing. Among the represented architectural styles are the [Greek Revival](#) of the mid-nineteenth century, the [Queen Anne](#) of the late nineteenth century, and the [Colonial Revival](#) and [Craftsman](#) styles of the early twentieth century. These buildings contribute to the character of the historic district, which was established during the period of development and prosperity of Bridgewater from 1818 to 1933 (the year the Bridgewater Bridge was completed). In addition, there are 39 noncontributing resources that are found widely dispersed through the district.

The Bridgewater District includes 136 buildings and two structures. Of these, 97 of the buildings and both of the structures contribute to the character of the district (all of the individually-described buildings and structures in the narrative below are contributing). One of these contributing buildings had previously been listed in the National Register of Historic Places as an individual landmark. Sixteen buildings and one structure were erected before 1860, eleven buildings between 1860 and 1880; forty-two between 1880 and 1900, and forty-eight buildings and one structure (the Bridgewater Bridge) between 1900 and 1933.

When most of Bridgewater, including the historic district, was laid out in 1818, the plan was developed as a grid with public open space, like a typical central and western Pennsylvania town plan. However, there were a number of unique characteristics to Bridgewater's grid, caused by local conditions. First, the grid was long and narrow. Bridgewater was defined by the river to the east and was hemmed in to the west by a bluff, and so it is no more than two or three blocks wide, with Market Street the principal north-south street. Second, there were alleys that cut through the blocks — again typical of nineteenth-century urban development in western Pennsylvania — but

they were sporadic, not continuous. Third, there were not one, but two, public squares in the original plan. These squares, which were located at Market and Fulton Streets ("Market Square") and on Market between Poplar and Elm Streets ("Public Square"), seem never to have played the role of the public gathering places or markets that the "diamonds" of other central and western Pennsylvania towns played (probably because of the prominent role of Bridge Street in Bridgewater's commercial and social history). However, before they disappeared by the turn of the century, the public squares in Bridgewater had impressed their mark on the development pattern of the district. Houses built around the squares were set back further from Market Street than those that lined Market Street directly, and those increased setbacks at Fulton and Elm Streets remain today. They are the deepest building site setbacks in Bridgewater, except for houses built along the rise of the bluff in the 1100 block of Market Street. Otherwise, the typical nineteenth century urban pattern prevails: the oldest buildings (and the commercial buildings along Bridge Street) are built at the sidewalk line, without any setback, while buildings from the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are built with a modest (about twenty-foot) setback to the building line.

There are three principal streets in Bridgewater: Riverside Drive (formerly Water Street), running north-south along the Beaver River, Market Street, roughly parallel to and one block to the west of Riverside Drive; and Bridge Street, which starts at the bridge over the Beaver River (to Rochester) and runs west toward Beaver Borough, intersecting at right angles with Market Street.

Bridge Street is the core of the traditional commercial district in Bridgewater. Almost all of the older buildings on the south side of Bridge Street were destroyed in the 1960s for the expansion of an automobile dealership. The buildings on the north side of the street, however, constitute an intact commercial district. While a church and a few houses are to be found along Bridge Street, most of the buildings are commercial, one to three stories in height, located at the sidewalk line, and built of brick. The commercial buildings are mostly either side-gabled and built in the vernacular Greek Revival style in the pre-Civil War era, or [Italianate](#) buildings of the 1870s and 1880s with wide bracketed cornices at the roofline. On the east side of its intersection with Market Street, Bridge Street is still flanked by two buildings from the early to mid-nineteenth century, which were built with Federal and Greek Revival features. The first, at 121 Bridge Street, is a five-bay-wide center-hall building with double-chimney gable ends. The central entrance is an arched doorway, with its origin in the Federal style of architecture. Across Bridge Street, at the corner of Market Street, stands the remains of the Mulheim Building, a three-story, eight-bay-wide commercial edifice. While the eastern half of the Mulheim Building was razed in the mid-twentieth century, the remaining section retains its original vernacular Greek Revival features: simple, sparse design, plain narrow lintels over the openings, and six-over-six-light sash windows. On the other side of Market Street, at 200-206 Bridge Street, stands a commercial building that was known as the Knights of Pythias Building when it was first built in the 1880s. The first-floor storefronts are surmounted by a hall (known as Hurst's Opera House, after the first owner of the building) and capped by a projecting wooden cornice supported on paired wooden brackets. This bracketed cornice and the arched and ornamented windows are characteristic of the Italianate style, which was in its last stages in the 1880s. Alongside these principal buildings is an intact group of smaller commercial buildings that date from around 1840 through the 1920s, forming an ensemble along Bridge Street that ends at the First Presbyterian Church (built 1876).

Market Street is the longest and most important street in Bridgewater. It is mostly

residential in character, with a few commercial and institutional buildings interspersed with detached houses. A number of the houses were built of brick with the typical details of the Greek Revival style (one high-style example, the William Dunlap Mansion [ca. 1840, 1298 Market Street], was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980). Most of the houses, though, are two-story, wood-frame buildings that were built between the 1890s and the 1920s in the Queen Anne style or under the influence of the Craftsman style. The houses typically have full-width front porches, and are set back slightly from the sidewalk, except at the sites of the original public squares. Together with the Bridgewater United Methodist Church and the second Bridgewater Public School, these houses impart a distinct nineteenth- and early twentieth-century character to Market Street, with very few intrusions from later decades.

Riverside Drive was originally known as Water Street. Along its west side are a number of houses, several of which are brick houses built in the Greek Revival style during the canal era. Canal-related shipping operations, foundries, and factories once lined the east side of the street, backing onto the river, but they are now all gone. In their place today, within the boundaries of the historic district, is parkland (including a boardwalk and amphitheater) that slopes down to the water. Mid- and late-twentieth century restaurants and water-related businesses (such as marinas), none of which are contributing, can now be found both north and south of the boundaries of the district. Fourteen (14) of the buildings in the historic district (or ten per cent) are commercial in use. These are concentrated on Bridge Street, which, as the principal east-west connecting road between Beaver and Rochester (and points east), early became the preferred site for retail and service establishments in Bridgewater. These range from two- and three-story buildings from the nineteenth century, with first-floor storefronts and upper-floor apartments and offices, to one-story commercial buildings from the early twentieth century. Almost all of the remaining buildings — numbering 114, or 84 per cent of the buildings in the district — are residential. All but two of these are detached houses, which is typical for small towns and cities in central and western Pennsylvania. Aside from the hotels that existed during parts of the borough's history, there were never a significant number of multiple dwellings in Bridgewater.

Forty-two (42) of the buildings in the district (31 per cent) are built of brick. Most of the rest — ninety (90), or 66 per cent — are constructed with wood frames. Almost all of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings rest on sandstone foundations, and a few still retain their original slate roofs. In most cases, the roofing material has been replaced by asphalt shingles. Over one-half of the buildings in the historic district (57 per cent) are two stories in height, while another 23 per cent were constructed two-and-one-half stories tall. Almost all of these resources are houses. Fifteen (15) buildings in the district (11 per cent) are one story high, four of these are churches, while the rest are mid-twentieth century commercial buildings and ranch-style houses that are not contributing resources. Only two buildings are as much as three stories in height, and they are the most prominent commercial buildings on Bridge Street (flanking the intersection with Market Street). Taken together, these figures indicate that the most common building type in the historic district is the two- or two-and-one-half-story wood-frame single-family house. The houses that were constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are also usually faced with a one-story-tall porch across the front of the house that sometimes wrapped around the side as well.

A significant number of contributing resources in the Bridgewater Historic District — sixteen buildings and one structure, or 12 per cent of the overall number of resources — survive from the district's first period of prosperity, during the construction and

operation of the Beaver Division Canal before the Civil War. The one structure is the dam and lock complex of the canal itself, built between 1831 and 1834. The other extant pre-Civil War buildings are concentrated in two sections of the district: one, along Bridge Street and on Market Street and Riverside Drive near Bridge Street; and the other, in the 1200 and 1300 blocks of Market Street. This distribution testifies to the bifurcated nature of Bridgewater during that time, with one center of commerce at Bridge Street and a second to the north near the early settlement of Sharon. The oldest house in Bridgewater is the Joseph Hemphill House of 1818. It is two stories tall, with a symmetrical, five-bay facade facing Market Street. The central entrance indicates that it was built with a center-hall plan, typical of the early residential architecture of western Pennsylvania, while its simplicity and sparseness of design is also representative of this period. There are two high-style Greek Revival houses at the upper end of Market Street — the temple-form William Dunlap Mansion (of around 1840), which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, and the Davidson House, with its two-tiered recessed porches and Ionic columns temple-form Greek Revival buildings were more common in western Pennsylvania than buildings with stacked recessed entries, like the Davidson House, although similar examples did exist: the Gordon House near [Waynesburg](#) (in [Greene County](#)) and the Playford House in [Brownsville](#) (in [Fayette County](#)), both of which were described in *The Architectural Heritage of Early Western Pennsylvania* (Charles Stotz, 1966). The other pre-Civil War buildings in Bridgewater are vernacular in character, simple designs with plain wooden lintels and sills, and transoms and sidelights around central entryways.

The historic district experienced its largest amount of construction during the period from 1860 to 1933, when the borough was prospering through river trade and small industries. Seventy-seven per cent of the district's extant building stock (and one of the structures, the bridge) dates from that period, including some non-contributing buildings. The buildings that were built between 1860 and 1880, including examples of the Italianate and French [Second Empire](#) architectural styles, can be found largely along Bridge Street and at the northern end of the district. However, the buildings that date from 1880 to the end of the First World War are concentrated in the middle (700 to 1100) blocks of Market Street and Riverside Drive, ending the earlier bifurcated character of the district. Most of these appear to have been built from 1890 to 1910 in a vernacular or "builders' version" of the Queen Anne style; a few, though, including the houses at 898 and 1004 Market Street, are good individual examples of the style. They exhibit the varied wall surfaces (wood siding and shingles), the complex roof shapes, the projecting bays, and the turned-wood ornament that were characteristic of the Queen Anne style. Twelve houses (9 per cent of the total) from this group can be dated to the 1920s. Within the district, there is a substantial number of houses (sixteen, or 12 per cent of the total number of buildings) that were constructed in the [Foursquare](#) type from the period 1900 to 1933, as well as four examples of the [Craftsman bungalow](#) type.

Two structures that relate to the history of transportation systems in Bridgewater are located within the boundaries of the historic district. One of these, the remains of the lock and dam system of the Beaver Division of the Pennsylvania Canal, was an important component of the operation of the Canal during the first half of the nineteenth century. Dam Number 6 spanned the Beaver River from the Girard Locks to Bridgewater, a distance of approximately 450 feet, just downstream from the Bridgewater Bridge. Its purpose was to maintain an adequate water level in the Beaver River for slackwater navigation of canal packets and steamboats. It survives under the surface of the river, the level of which was raised fifteen feet in 1935 with the

construction of the Montgomery Island Lock and Dam on the [Ohio River](#) below the mouth of the Beaver River. The two Girard Locks (Number 16 and 17) were an integral part of the canal system, raising and lowering boats around the dam. The northernmost lock was, naturally, higher than the southernmost, following the level of the river. The locks were larger than the standard of sixteen feet width by one hundred feet length, in order to accommodate riverboats as well as canal packets (they were built with a length of one hundred twenty [120] feet). A section of the stone walls of the northernmost and higher of the Girard Locks still remains visible on the eastern bank of the river, in the Borough of Rochester, just south of the Bridgewater Bridge. However, filled in, the lock now serves as the foundation for the sewage pumping station of the Borough of Rochester, a small (approximately twenty-five-foot square) one-story brick building constructed about 1960. A curved stone wall that formed the northeastern segment of the lock and dam system still remains above water. In addition, there is a very high probability that subsurface remains of the southernmost and lower lock continue south of the exposed lock for approximately 120 feet. The boundary of the historic district was located so that the subsurface remains would be included in the district.

The second historic structure in the Bridgewater Historic District is the steel through truss (Parker, Pratt type) Bridgewater Bridge, which spans the Beaver River from Bridge Street in Bridgewater to Rochester on the eastern side of the river. This is the third bridge on this site, the first bridge (1824 to 1884) was destroyed by a flood, while the second (1884 to 1931) was so weakened by the burning of the wooden bridge deck that it had to be replaced. The present bridge was opened in 1933, the date chosen as the end of the district's period of significance. It crosses the seven hundred foot distance between the river bluffs in three spans, the middle of which is by far the longest, since it spans the navigable channel. The historic district boundaries were extended to the east, into the Borough of Rochester, to incorporate the eastern end of the bridge and its approaches.

The district contains four church buildings built between 1839 and 1910. The oldest is the first Bridgewater Methodist Episcopal Church, at Cherry Street and Otter Lane, which was constructed in 1839 in the vernacular Greek Revival style. It is a simple gabled brick building with tall second-floor windows, framed at the front in two-story-tall brick arches. The most architecturally prominent are the Bridgewater Presbyterian Church (1876) on Bridge Street and the second Bridgewater Methodist Episcopal Church (1907) at Market Street and Leopard Lane. The Presbyterian Church is a front-gabled brick building with a square tower rising in the middle of the facade. Its round-arched openings and corbel tables are typical features of the Romanesque Revival style of the second half of the nineteenth century. The 1907 Methodist Episcopal Church was built with two gabled wings that embrace a square corner tower. The Classical style entryway is set in the front wall of the tower, and indicates the Classical Revival character of the elements of the church. The fourth church (the Church of the Living God) is a small aluminum-sided building of little architectural or historical significance.

One industrial building from the turn of the century survives in the district. The former Keystone Bakery is a complex of four one- to three-story wings at 500 Market Street that have been adaptively reused as a restaurant, banquet hall, and offices. These four elements include the original two-story brick bakery, which was three bays wide (and to which was later added a third story), the one-story-tall north annex of six bays; the three-story south annex; and a two-story addition to the south. Their flat roofs, segmentally-arched windows, and corbeled cornices are typical of industrial buildings of the turn of the century. A one-story stucco-clad addition was constructed circa 1990 on

the river side of the complex to provide a separate entrance to the new restaurant. The Market Street side of the complex has been altered only slightly (mostly through the installation of new doors and windows), however, and the integrity of the complex as a historic resource remains high. Other industrial and warehouse buildings from the Canal era and the turn of the century have not fared as well, and have been demolished for parking lots, vacant lots, and new riverfront uses.

The two former school buildings in the historic district still stand, but with different uses. The first Bridgewater Public School, built in 1860 in the Greek Revival style and standing in the 700 block of Market Street, has been converted into the borough's municipal building, with government offices and the borough fire department. It is a two-story-tall, three-bay-wide brick building with a front-gabled roof and symmetrical one-story brick wings (which were modified in the 1920s to house the fire department). The second school building, which was known as the West Bridgewater Public School, was built in 1915 at Market and Canal Streets as the replacement for the first school. It is a two-story tan brick building, larger than the first school, with a flat roof and a Tudor-arched stone entryway. It was closed in the 1970s and has been rehabilitated for use as an apartment building.

The historic district's architectural resources are largely intact — 99 of the buildings and structures, or 71 per cent of the total, contribute to the character of the district. As is common in central and western Pennsylvania, many wood-frame buildings have been covered with synthetic siding, usually aluminum. However, most of these houses retain a variety of significant character-defining features, such as original window frames and sash, doors, porches, chimneys, rooflines, and foundations. For the most part, the alterations to buildings in the Bridgewater district do not seriously affect the integrity of the historic character of the district.

However, 39 buildings (29 per cent of the total number of resources in the district) are noncontributing. Fifteen of these are buildings that were built after 1933, after the district's period of significance. These contemporary resources — most of which are postwar suburban-style ranch houses — are spread throughout the district, with one concentration of eight in the 1200 and 1300 blocks of Market Street. The other twenty-four noncontributing buildings are older houses that have been severely altered. These alterations include complete residing with contemporary wood or synthetic sidings, retaining no significant details from the original designs; altering the windows and window openings; and adding details (such as Colonial-style doorways) that are not compatible with the original design of the buildings. These altered noncontributing buildings are also not concentrated, but are broadly interspersed along the full length of Market and Bridge Streets. In addition, most of the non-contributing buildings are the same size as the contributing buildings, and do not by their massing detract from the overall character of the district.

In summary, the Bridgewater Historic District contains a mixture of commercial and residential buildings, many of which were built in the mid-19th century in the Greek Revival style, or at the turn of the 20th century in the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles. Approximately three-quarters of the buildings contribute to the significance of the district. Some of those that do not are houses that were built after the district's period of significance, but most are buildings that have lost their historical integrity. These non-contributing buildings are not concentrated in any particular section of the district. Since three-quarters of the resources are still intact, or still retain the basic forms and details of their origins, and since most of the non-contributing buildings are not

intrusive to the overall character of the historic district, Bridgewater continues to reflect its historic origins and architectural significance.

## Significance

The Bridgewater Historic District is locally significant in the areas of Transportation and Commerce for its association with a succession of transportation systems that served the community during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and led to its economic and physical development. These included the Ohio and Beaver Rivers, the Canal, and the Bridgewater-Rochester Bridge over the Beaver River. Bridgewater also possesses local significance in the area of Architecture for its collection of historic resources that date between 1818 and 1933. These include excellent examples of the Greek Revival and Queen Anne styles from the middle and end of the nineteenth century, and represent the successive periods of Bridgewater's history. The period of significance of the Bridgewater Historic District begins in 1818 (when the oldest extant building was constructed), during its initial period of prosperity as a boat-building center and a depot for river commerce. It extends through the periods of rapid growth based on river and canal commerce during the nineteenth century, and even after the cessation of canal traffic in 1901, as Bridgewater retained its local importance as a center of river traffic and commerce into the early twentieth century. The period of significance ends with the construction of the existing Bridgewater Bridge in 1933.

In 1803, the Harmony Society purchased land at Beaver Point, also known later as Stone's Point, at the confluence of the two rivers (south of the boundaries of the historic district). There it built a warehouse that remained in use until the 1850s. Beaver Point became well-established as a forwarding point for the shipment of agricultural products down the Ohio, and for the landing and storage of goods from New Orleans and [Pittsburgh](#). By the 1830s, when Stephen Stone built a hotel there, Beaver Point had also become the site of boat-building and a stopping-point for riverboats. The first passenger-carrying steamboat between Beaver and Pittsburgh was built at the Girard Locks, across the Beaver River from Bridgewater. Other steamboats, including the "Beaver", the "Fallston", and the "New Castle", which became the nucleus of the Ohio River trade, were built in Bridgewater itself. In 1832, Gordon's "Gazetteer of Pennsylvania" claimed that Bridgewater — which by that time had 110 dwellings, four taverns, five stores, one church, and a saw mill, salt works, iron foundry, and a brewery — had developed into "the principal depot for the trade passing up and down the Beaver Valley, and to and from the Western Reserve in the state of Ohio." Much of the section that was known as Beaver Point later was washed into the Ohio River during the succession of floods that plagued Bridgewater during its history.

The Beaver River was a major highway for north-south water-home traffic, but a major obstacle for early land vehicles moving east and west. In prehistory, the Native American tribes in the region had used trails that ran along the north bank of the Ohio River and the west bank of the Beaver. Their crossing at the mouth of the Beaver River signified the importance of this location even in those early years. However, despite its known use as a prehistoric river crossing site, the potential for archaeological significance of this location has been reduced by considerable disturbance by both man and nature. The crossing site was used by military expeditions of the late eighteenth century, including Col. Henry Bouquet's campaign of 1764 and Gen. Lachlan McIntosh's expedition of 1778. However, it was not until 1816 that the first bridge over the Beaver River, a covered wooden bridge, was completed between what is now Wolf Lane in Bridgewater on the west bank and Rochester on the east bank. This first bridge lasted

only five years before it was destroyed by a windstorm. It was replaced by a new covered wooden toll bridge, built slightly upriver. The location of this bridge, providing the principal land route between Beaver and Rochester, established the commercial center of Bridge Street in Bridgewater. The bridge remained a very significant factor in the development of Bridgewater, leading to the development of the Bridge Street business district and the industrial sector along Water Street (Riverside Drive), and eventually providing access to electric streetcars to run up Market Street toward New Brighton. The second wooden bridge lasted until 1884, when a major flood destroyed it. It was replaced by an iron toll bridge, which became unusable in 1931 when the wood block flooring burned. Finally, the present Bridgewater Bridge opened in 1933 on the site of its two predecessors. The bridge is included in the historic district for its transportation and commercial significance, rather than for its engineering, which is typical for the time.

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, one of the most important citizens of Bridgewater was Joseph Hemphill. Hemphill was a prominent individual in the history of Beaver County, a surveyor who served as one of the first officers of the county when it was established in 1800 and who held numerous official posts over the years. Hemphill was also one of the largest landowners in Bridgewater itself, and was responsible for the platting of a substantial portion of the borough in 1818 (which can be taken as the beginning date for the substantial development of Bridgewater in the early nineteenth century). He was the proprietor of an inn at the corner of Bridge and Water Streets, serving both the water-borne traffic on the river and the vehicular traffic on the bridge. Hemphill's own house, the oldest surviving building in Bridgewater, is an example of the early vernacular Greek Revival style, and still stands at 815 Market Street.

After the existence of the Beaver River, the riverboat trade, and the bridge crossing over the river, which provided the foundation for the founding of Bridgewater, the construction of the Beaver Division of the Erie Extension of the Pennsylvania Canal was the most important factor in the development of the borough. In 1825, the General Assembly authorized the establishment of "navigable communication between the eastern and western waters of the state and Lake Erie", and the following year voted to approve the "commencement of a canal, to be constructed at the expense of the State and to be called 'the Pennsylvania Canal'". While construction of the Main Line of the Canal from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh proceeded apace, planning began for an extension of the canal north of the Ohio River to Lake Erie. The path chosen included the Beaver Division (from the Ohio north to Pulaski, in Lawrence County), the Shenango Division (Pulaski to Conneaut Lake), and the Erie Division (Conneaut Lake to Erie); the Beaver Division was connected to Akron, Ohio, by the Pennsylvania and Ohio ("Crosscut") Canal at New Castle. Construction of the 31-mile Beaver Division was begun at a ground-breaking ceremony on July 26, 1831, and was completed in 1834. The Beaver Division included sixteen miles of slackwater navigation (travel on the unchanneled Beaver River), including the stretch at the mouth of the Beaver River. A dam was built across the mouth of the Beaver, just below the site of the existing bridge, to ensure sufficient water for navigation. The Girard Locks — named for the millionaire Philadelphian, Stephen Girard — were built on the Rochester side of the river, opposite Bridgewater. They were built larger than usual, in order to provide passage for steamboats as well as barges between the Beaver and Ohio Rivers. Together, the Girard Locks and the dam were essential to the operation of the canal; their significance is related to their importance to the transportation and commerce of the region, rather than to their design and engineering (which was typical for dams and locks along the canal). It was not until 1844, however, that the entire 136-mile-long Erie Extension Canal was

completed and opened to traffic.

The opening of the Beaver Division of the Canal was a great boon to Bridgewater, which — along with Rochester — became the major terminus at the Ohio River end. Since both of the boroughs were located at the mouth of the canal, they were able to develop as transfer points for the warehousing and reloading of cargo between canal boats and river steamboats. Bridgewater's wider flats (the low, flat section actually accounts for most of the borough) and the readiness of its citizens to invest in an improved public landing (along Water Street above the bridge) and private storage facilities made it the principal terminus of the canal. Beaver Point in particular became an important forwarding place for agricultural products from the Ohio Valley, and for the landing and storage of manufactured goods from Pittsburgh and New Orleans. Rochester did have facilities for the shipping of goods below its bluff, even though its flats section was more limited in size than Bridgewater's. This, naturally, limited the growth of Rochester Borough, and at first it grew as an adjunct to flourishing Bridgewater (in fact, an early name for Rochester was "East Bridgewater"). Bridge Street became the main business street in Bridgewater, with hotels at Water Street (Dunlap's Hotel and the Ankeny Hotel) that provided shelter to canal and river travelers. Bridgewater thus became the most prominent of the three boroughs at the mouth of the Beaver River (including Rochester and Beaver) in the 1830s and 1840s due its dominance of the canal commerce; its population (900 in 1840) was greater than that of Beaver, and its commercial activity greater than that of Rochester. By 1850 all three boroughs had a population of approximately 1000, but there was more commercial activity in Bridgewater than in Rochester or Beaver. In fact, commercial activity in Beaver was limited mostly to retail sales, since neither river commerce or industry was located there. Beaver's growth, in fact, took place because of its establishment as the county seat, with the legal, financial, and administrative functions that inhere to that status.

The surviving buildings in Bridgewater from the mid-nineteenth century reflect the commercial prosperity of Bridgewater during the Canal era. The concentration of these buildings along and near Bridge Street, and along Riverside Drive, indicates the importance of the river and of Bridge Street in the commercial activity of the time. Most of them are simple two-story buildings that share the same basic massing and starkness of detailing. The one exceptional commercial building is the three-story Mulheim Building at the corner of Market and Bridge Streets, the principal intersection in the district. Two of the houses are also exceptional in their size and attention to the details of the Greek Revival style. The William Dunlap Mansion and the Davidson House were both built around 1840, the former in the temple form of the style and the latter with recessed classical porches. Both of these houses, the most prominent in the district, were constructed by owners who had made their fortunes in the Canal-based commerce of the day, and so directly represent the prosperity of the time. In fact, Bridgewater's extant mid-19th century buildings are significant as the heritage of its prosperity during this period, especially in comparison to the very few remaining buildings from that period in Beaver or Rochester.

Bridgewater was at its most prosperous in the middle of the nineteenth century, during the heyday of the Erie Extension Canal. However, the construction of the first state-wide railroad lines in the early 1850s marked the beginning of the decline of the Canal. Although not as precipitous as that of the Main Line Canal, the decline of the Erie Extension Canal was sure enough in the face of the competition of the railroads that it was closed to traffic in 1872. River traffic through the Girard Locks continued for a while, though, carrying traffic and goods from Pittsburgh and west on the Ohio River to

the burgeoning industrial towns up the Beaver River at Beaver Falls and New Castle. However, even the locks closed for good in 1901. While they functioned, though, Bridgewater continued to prosper with the momentum that its economy had developed earlier. In 1876, there were three iron foundries, two sawmills, one grist mill, two wagon factories, and three tanneries in Bridgewater, employing a substantial portion of the population of 1100. Bridge Street commercial buildings were occupied by a full assortment of retail shops and services. In 1884, the Keystone Bakery moved from Beaver to a site on Bridge Street, and then in 1902 it moved again to a new plant on Market Street. The Keystone Bakery became the largest bakery in Western Pennsylvania outside of Pittsburgh (and its surviving buildings, the last industrial resources extant in Bridgewater, are an integral part of the historic district). Also in the 1880s, there was a glass factory on lower Market Street and a hob-nail factory at Market and Fulton Streets. The "Malt House", a brewery owned by the Dunlap family, stood at that time on Lion Street near Market Street (on the site that was later occupied by the second Bridgewater School).

The surviving buildings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflect the character of life in Bridgewater in those years. Several substantial commercial buildings on Bridge Street, built in the Italianate and Second Empire styles of the 1870s and 1880s, indicate that Bridge Street was still the established commercial center of Bridgewater. The Keystone Bakery complex, the sole extant industrial complex in the historic district, is representative of the manufacturing base of the borough's prosperity at the turn of the century. The second Bridgewater Methodist Episcopal Church, which was built in 1907, is also descriptive of a need to expand and a desire to conform to the most fashionable style of architecture of the day — the Classical Revival. However, most of the houses built during this period were relatively modest; no mansions like the William Dunlap Mansion were built at the turn of the century. On the contrary, the houses of this time that line Market Street give the historic district a solidly middle-class character.

The construction of railroad lines in the Beaver Valley changed the patterns of transportation and commerce, and thus the patterns of growth and development that affected Bridgewater, Rochester, and Beaver. The first rail line was laid on the eastern bank of the Beaver Valley, through Rochester, in 1850 and 1851. This rail line, the Pittsburgh and Erie Railroad, later became a section of the Pittsburgh, Ft. Wayne & Chicago, a part of the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the dominant railroad in the region. No railroad was built through either Bridgewater or Beaver proper; in fact, when the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad was finally built in 1874 to connect the ore supplies of the Great Lakes with the steel mills of Pittsburgh, it ran along the foot of the bluff that marks the boundary between the two boroughs. Bridgewater had access to the railroad at the Beaver station, but the main effect of the line was to reinforce the natural barrier to the west. The Pennsylvania Railroad ran through and served the commercial flats sections of Rochester; the P & LE served no such purpose in Bridgewater and Beaver. Therefore, the industrial section of Rochester prospered in the second half of the nineteenth century, with foundries, glass and bottle factories, a brewery, brick kilns, and a barrel works, among other plants. A number of industries also existed along the riverfront in Bridgewater at that time (including foundries, sawmills, and a bakery), but these plants were fewer in number, smaller in size, and were dependent on the ever-diminishing river trade. The failure of the railroad to locate along the bank of the Beaver River meant that the industries of Bridgewater were cut off from the principal means of transporting supplies and goods in the late nineteenth century, and helped to contribute to their demise.

As a result, the competitive positions of Bridgewater and Rochester were reversed by the turn of the century. In 1900, Rochester had a population of nearly 4800, while Bridgewater's population had grown only slightly to about 1400. Rochester's population spread out atop the bluff on the eastern side of the Beaver River, and a commercial district developed along Brighton Avenue (which connected the Ohio River flats with the Bridgewater Bridge). Bridgewater Borough was confined to its original boundaries on the flats along the western bank of the river; this constraint helped to limit the possibility of growth there. Beaver, on the other hand, developed separately as the administrative and educational center of the county. Free from economic fluctuations caused by the industrial economy, but able to take advantage of increased accessibility through the development of the railroads, Beaver grew moderately to a population of about 2300 in 1900. The architectural resources of Beaver illustrate its increasingly dominant position among the three boroughs at this time. While there are very few extant buildings from the canal era in Beaver, there are more buildings in the Italianate and Second Empire styles, which indicates prosperity in the decades after the Civil War. On its more modest streets, the houses in Beaver have much the same middle-class vernacular Queen Anne and Foursquare character as Market Street in Bridgewater. However, Beaver has a number of very large houses in the Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and [Tudor](#) Revival styles, especially along Main Street and the riverfronts. This contrasts with Bridgewater, in which there are no large houses that date from the turn of the century. In addition, the commercial buildings in Beaver date primarily from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and are larger and more elaborate than the store buildings on Bridge Street in Bridgewater. Beaver had clearly surpassed Bridgewater in prosperity and prestige by the late nineteenth century.

During the 1920s, circumstances began to act against the continuing river-based prosperity of Bridgewater. The decline and discontinuance of river-borne traffic was caused principally by the competition of the railroads (and, in the twentieth century, by motor transport). The demise of river commerce was also caused in part by the tremendous consolidation and growth of industries along the Ohio and Beaver Rivers at the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, which shifted river traffic toward the transporting of bulk cargo to and from the mills. The end of river commerce, the influence of which was not replaced within Bridgewater by the railroads, led to the abandonment of canal boat and river boat docking and service facilities along Water Street (Riverside Drive). The construction of huge industrial plants elsewhere along the rivers at the turn of the century, culminating in the immense Jones and Laughlin Steel mill at Aliquippa just up the Ohio, had two other effects on the economy of Bridgewater they drove smaller competing plants, such as the foundries in Bridgewater, out of business, and they drew off the supply of skilled labor to work at higher-paying jobs in the mills. Finally, a series of disastrous floods in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (in 1884, 1898, 1905, 1907, 1913, 1915, 1932, and 1936) made it difficult to continue operating businesses along the river, and gave the coup de grace to some of the remaining struggling firms. As a result, little construction occurred in the historic district between the 1920s and the 1980s, and the population of Bridgewater Borough slowly declined to 879 in 1980. Road construction in the 1950s and 1960s further circumscribed the outward growth of the borough, and together with the expansion of an automobile dealership in 1962 caused the demolition of most of the historic structures south of Bridge Street. A few ranch-style houses; suburban in character, were built in the upper section of Market Street in the 1950s and 1960s, but aside from these examples, Bridgewater remained relatively stagnant, in economic terms, through the middle of the twentieth century. This relative lack of prosperity had the salubrious

effect, however, of protecting Bridgewater's historic building stock from major 20th-century intrusions. The neighboring borough of Rochester, on the other hand, continued to grow and prosper, at least until the Great Depression. By 1930 its population was over 7700. However, the effects of the Depression and the damage caused to the industrial plants in the river flats by the flood of 1936 were devastating to Rochester's prosperity. After World War II, Rochester languished as people and businesses settled outside the municipal boundaries, and by 1970 its population had decreased to about 4800. To the west of Bridgewater, however, Beaver was immune to these circumstances, since its economic life had not been based on industry. It continued to survive and grow, due its eminence as county seat. Affected by the increasing importance of government and education in American society after World War II, Beaver became the largest of the three boroughs, with a 1970 population of 6100 and a substantial stock of post-war suburban-style houses.

In summary, Bridgewater is an excellent example of a small western Pennsylvania town that owed its early economic activity and its architectural and urban character to the transportation systems that served the region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and which declined economically after those systems were supplanted by new and different ones in the twentieth century. The contributing resources in the historic district principally represent two separate periods — the Canal Era (1831-1852), when Bridgewater was a principal terminus of the Beaver Division of the Erie Extension Canal, and when the borough was at its most prosperous and important, and the period of river commerce (1852-1920), during which Bridgewater maintained an industrial and commercial base through the river trade that remained, though dwindling, after the canal was supplanted by the railroads. Those contributing resources represent a better collection of mid-19th century buildings than can be found in neighboring areas of Beaver County, as well as a more intact collection of late 19th and early 20th century buildings. Bridgewater's decline after the 1920s contrasted with the prosperity and growth of Rochester (which itself declined after the 1930s) and especially of Beaver, the neighboring county seat. However, because of its nineteenth and early twentieth century importance and its intact historic resources, Bridgewater stands today as a good example of a locally-significant historic community.

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[See Map](#)

**Street Names:** [Bridge Street](#), [Cherry Alley](#), [Elm Street](#), [Fulton Street](#), [Mulberry Street](#)

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