The land on which Berwyn Heights is located was home to Native American Indians as far back as 8,000 years ago. In 1608, Algonquian-speaking groups, which were part of a chieftain called the Conoys, inhabited the river and creek areas of the Potomac River. The Conoys of the Indian Creek area were the Nacotchtanks (Anacostanks). Dennis Webb, a Berwyn Heights resident, identified one of the largest American Indian sites on the East Coast, on Indian Creek. The state government holds thousands of artifacts from the site. Artifacts from these people continue to be found in yards and gardens throughout Berwyn Heights.

The first English colonists had extensive contacts with the Conoys beginning in 1634. Many precautions were taken to ensure peace in the intervening years through 1696 when Prince George's County was established. A troop of rangers was maintained to cover the frontier plantations from the Anacostia to the Pennsylvania line. In 1700, the Conoys were removed to Pennsylvania, but, incidents involving Indians continued between 1699 and 1738. By 1700, the Algonquian culture, which had survived here for over a thousand years, vanished.

During the 18th Century, the area of our present town was known as the New Scotland Hundred. Tobacco was the chief money crop of the Maryland colonies, where slaves and indentured servants performed much of the intensive manual labor. Black history is interwoven with colonial and American Indian history. Men from this area fought in the American Revolution. The gravesites of two Revolutionary soldiers from the Walker family are located just outside the town at the end of Walker Drive in a DAR authenticated cemetery. At one time the Walker family owned all, or a large portion, of Berwyn Heights.

The Town of Berwyn Heights officially came into being on April 2, 1896, by an act of the Maryland General Assembly. Don Skarda in his History of a Small Town tells us that the charter specified the corporate limits of the Town to include all the same land contained in Edward Graves’ subdivision of the tract of land heretofore known as Charlton Heights. The Charter called for the election of three commissioners to serve for 1 year, without pay, to administer the affairs of the Town. They were authorized to appoint a Town Clerk to keep appropriate records and a Bailiff to preserve peace and order. The Commissioners were authorized to levy taxes on all real and personal property. The charter specified that an election of Commissioners was to be held on the first Monday in May in the year 1896. However, the official establishment of the Town did not become a functioning reality until 28 years later.
Since its inception in April 2003, the BHHC has implemented several ambitious and successful projects:

**THE ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**
The BHHC conducts audio/video interviews with past and present residents to record descriptions and details of what life was like in the early days of our town.

**HISTORIC STREET MARKER PROJECT**
Each year, the BHHC dedicates a “Historic Street Marker” to honor the people, buildings and sites of historical significance in Berwyn Heights.

**SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR BROCHURE**
This fold-out brochure features a map with photos to guide walkers, hikers and bikers on a mile-long tour of some of our town’s most cherished historic homes, as well as the locations of the Historic Street Markers.

**MUSEUM / EVENTS**
The BHHC has a small museum at the Town Center and also hosts several events each year, from area museum tours and book signings, to historical-themed holiday receptions and anniversaries. We welcome you to drop in at our monthly meetings, held every fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m., in the Town Offices. To contact the BHHC, call 301-474-5000, Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

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**The Berwyn Heights Historical Committee (BHHC)**

**Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA)**

ATHA is a State of Maryland Certified Heritage Area that encompasses 14 municipalities, as well as many neighborhoods in the unincorporated portions of northern Prince George’s County. Founded in 1997, ATHA, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) grassroots organization dedicated to advocate for, organize and promote heritage tourism in a way that fosters economic development, while revealing and protecting the cultural, historic and natural resources in each community within the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area.

To learn more about the organization, or to become a member, visit: www.anacostiatrails.org, or phone: (301) 887-0777.

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**The Tour**

Your tour begins on Berwyn Road at Ruatan Street and its length is just shy of a 1-mile loop (see map). Along the way, please feel free to drop by our Town Center where you can obtain more information about our town, its history and upcoming events.

In the first two blocks of the tour you’ll see the highest concentration of the Town’s historic structures in an area of about 800,000 square feet. The eight houses highlighted in this brochure were each evaluated and surveyed in 1986 by Susan Pearl of the Maryland-National Capitol Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). The eight featured homes range in date from 1888 to the 1920’s. Seven of the eight are Victorian, and were built almost simultaneously by the Charlton Heights Improvement Company during its very short life. The eighth home, the school house, was built in 1922 and functioned as a public elementary school until 1958, then was converted into a private residence in the 1970s. Most notably, four of the listed houses were built using Robert Shoppell’s pattern-book plans, distributed by the Cooperative Building Plan Association, and remain some of the finest examples of Shoppell homes in the area.

Please note, however, that all the homes featured on this tour do not have official designation as County historic homes. The Berwyn Heights Historical Committee (BHHC) plans to add other walking tours within Berwyn Heights to include those residences that already enjoy historic designation on the County and/or National Registers, and the others that will soon become eligible for consideration. Included on this map, you will also see the locations of the Town’s Historic Street Markers which acknowledge the original street names and honor the people, buildings and sites of historical significance in Town.

The following houses in this tour, are named after the original owners/builders of the structures.

2013 Berwyn Heights Historical Committee
1. Kleiner House (1888)
5603 Ruatan Street

Large two-and-one-half story gable-roofed frame house of late-Victorian-Shingle style, with three-story octagonal corner tower with abundant Queen-Anne-style decorative detail.

This house is an outstanding example of a late Victorian pattern book house (Shoppell Model #462). Constructed by the Charlton Heights Improvement Company as its model home for the new suburb, this house has always been a prominent landmark in this community.

2. Wolfe House (1889)
5617 Ruatan Street

Mansard roof house with a two-and-one-half story frame, white metal siding and five-by-two bays with a double-door entrance in the central bay. One-story hip-roofed porch along the main (northwest) facade, with lattice frieze. Roof covered in patterned tin with four dormers in a row on main facade.

This house is a rare local example of a late-Victorian dwelling with Second-Empire decorative detail; minimally altered, it is a unique landmark in this late 19th Century suburb.

3. Gohr House (1889)
5712 Ruatan Street


Possibly from a pattern book design, it is one of the earliest houses built by the Charlton Heights Improvement Company. With its additions to the east and north elevations, it is not eligible for historic designation, yet remains a cherished landmark in Berwyn Heights.

4. Chlopicki House (1889)
5717 Ruatan Street

Blue and white two-story, side-gabled frame cross-gabled house with a pyramidal-roof tower that adds a third-floor room to the northwest corner. Main block with a two-by-three bay and entrance in the second bay of an asymmetrical north facade. Ornate gable-ends decorated with ramiform paneling. Siding still original.

A favorite landmark for passersby at the corner of Ruatan and 58th Streets, this house is an outstanding example of a Queen-Anne-style dwelling constructed from Shoppell Design #449.
5. O’Dea House (1888)
5804 Ruatan Street
Prominent octagonal projecting bay on the south side with a three-story tower covered with scalloped and fish-scale shingles and a wraparound hip-roofed porch. Two-and-one-half story, side-gabled frame house with plain horizontal boards on the first story and scalloped shingles on the second. Entrance in the central bay of the main (south) façade. Pedimented gable-ends covered with fish-scale shingles and original siding.

Outstanding example of an elegant pattern book house (Shoppell Design # 216) constructed by the Charlton Heights Improvement Company as another model home for this late-Victorian suburb. This adored landmark is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

6. Cross House (1889)
5805 Ruatan Street
Entrance to this two-and-one-half story frame cross-gabled house in the first bay of the north façade. Wraparound porch, balustered balcony, fish-scale shingles and perforated bargeboards.

This house is a significant landmark that provides a good example of the first group of dwellings in this late-Victorian suburb.

7. Berwyn Heights School (1922)
5814 Ruatan Street
One-story side-gabled frame school house with five-bay south (main) façade and entrance in central bay. Door with sidelights and large single-paned transom. Gabled entry porch originally lighted by banks of six large 9/9 windows across east and west gable ends.

High molded concrete block foundation.

This substantial two-room schoolhouse replaced the earlier schoolhouse in the community of Berwyn Heights. With its original siding and lack of alterations, it is one of the best surviving examples of a 1920’s schoolhouse in the County.

8. Pickett House (1890)
8616 57th Avenue
Built by the Charlton Heights Improvement Company, probably from a pattern book design. Two-and-one-half story cross-gable frame house highlighted by decorative, stick-style elements and novelty shingling. Porch wraps around to one side supported by dark green-painted, chamfered posts with a geometric frieze course and picket railing. Sears garage and an old well with hand pump on lot. Original siding.

In 1994, an addition was constructed that is connected to the original house by an enclosed hallway. The County’s Historic Preservation Commission mandated a clear delineation between the old and new structure in order to qualify for historic designation.