Dear Reader,

This book is just what it says: Real Philly History, Real Fast.

It’s a quick and easy way to learn about Philadelphia’s heroes and historic sites. At your own pace, wherever you like. On the subway. While waiting for someone. Even in the bathroom.

It’s Unlike Any Book I Have Ever Seen about Philadelphia.

Fast facts and bullet copy tell you quickly about each notable subject. And you’ll find interesting oddities in every one of the fifty or so stories here. I wish I had owned this book when I was growing up . . . and when I started studying to become a certified tour guide.

Of course, Real Philly History is not a complete guide to every site in Philadelphia. That would require a far longer book and still be impossible to write. And this book is geared mostly to Center City. Read through it and I believe you’ll have a much greater appreciation for the marvelous and often-overlooked history and heroes we have in Philadelphia. And you’ll learn things most long-time residents still don’t know.

A Bonanza of Philly Secrets Lies Within.

Turn the pages and you’ll find the answers to numerous questions. What is the Philadelphia Eagles’ connection to the U.S. Custom House? Which famous artist may have been Philadelphia’s first nude model? Where is the country’s first quarantine station still located? Who was the Philadelphia Revolutionary War naval cap-
tain who terrorized the English in their backyard? Which city clock face is larger than Big Ben in London? Where was the Liberty Bell secretly damaged? (It wasn’t here in Philly.) And which Philadelphian has more than forty communities named after him?

You’ll Find Hidden Gems Like These on Every Page.

I hope these stories whet your appetite to learn more about Philadelphia’s fabulous and often unknown history. This book is like a Philadelphia survey course—quick, fun, and entertaining. And you’ll see “Nearby Attractions” at the end of every story that offer you more places to visit.

What Got Me Started on This Book?

At the request of Bernice Hamel, founder and then-managing editor of the Society Hill Reporter, I began writing these articles about Philadelphia in 2011. Six years later, I moved over to the Queen Village Neighbors Association Magazine. To me, each topic was a detective story I had to investigate to get the facts. I’d see a historical marker or site I knew nothing about and start digging. My thinking was that if it interested me, it would interest my readers. And that approach seems to have worked. I hope you agree.

Here’s a Bonus, to Help Make Exploring Philly Easier.

When I was a teenager, I learned an easy way to remember streets south of Market Street from my mother. This memory aid continues to help me find my way around the city today. So I’m including it here. I’ve never seen it in print before.

How to Remember Philly Streets

(Going South from Market)

I went to the Market to buy some Chestnuts. Changed my mind and bought some Walnuts.

Chased by a Locust, I ran from Spruce to Pine into a lumber (Lombard) yard.
South of it, I saw a girl standing on a bridge (Bainbridge) over the water (Fitzwater). Her name was Catharine, she was a Christian, and her father was a Carpenter in the Washington and Federal army.

So, now you have a simple way of knowing the names of Philly’s major streets going south from Market Street for about fourteen blocks.
I hope you find it helpful.

More Great Ways to Learn about Philly

Want to know more about Philadelphia history? Try three superb online sources: The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia; Hidden City Philadelphia; and History Making Productions, where films by Sam Katz’s marvelous company are free. And to find out what’s happening in Philly now—and every weekend—go to VisitPhilly.com.

My Recommendations

Go out and about, use this book, and visit the great sites included. Have fun and enjoy yourself. See the city that William Penn built in a formidable forest and that Ben Franklin improved in so many ways.

Then, let me know what you think of my book. Just e-mail me at murfman1@comcast.net or visit my website at realphillyhistory.com. I hope to put some unusual and interesting tours up there. And, of course, I’ll add new tidbits and facts about Philadelphia. My goal: To have you say, “I never knew Philadelphia was so interesting.”

If you really like the book, please recommend it to your friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Give copies away. And buy them for every occasion: Christmas, Easter, graduations, and more.

Thank you.
I hope to see you sometime on the wonderful streets of Philadelphia.

Jim Murphy

Philly history researcher. Story-teller. Certified member of the Association of Philadelphia Tour Guides.
Excerpt • Temple University Press

Map numbers correspond to chapters. (Map courtesy of Lucid Digital Designs.)
James Forten

A unique skill saved him from a life of servitude.
Like many Philadelphians, I’ve long known of James Forten’s reputation as a successful Black sailmaker and businessman.

But I had no idea how loyal, courageous, and generous he was. After doing more research on him, I’m ready to place him quite high on Philadelphia’s list of civic heroes.

Here’s why.

After being captured by the British on just his second voyage as a fourteen-year-old crewman on a privateer, Forten gave up a unique opportunity at a life of wealth and privilege.

All he had to do was agree to live in England with the family of Captain John Bazely, commander of the ship that captured him (more on this below). Forten refused to betray his country. As a result, he then spent seven months on the HMS Jersey, a British hellhole of a prison ship. An average of eight prisoners a day died on the Jersey.

Forten also gave up a chance to escape from that prison ship. Learning that a naval officer was to be exchanged, Forten reportedly asked to stow away in the man’s sea chest. At the last minute, Forten let Daniel Brewson, a White Philadelphian two years younger and “his companion in suffering,” go in his place. Then, he “assisted in taking down ‘the chest of old clothes’ . . . from the sides of the prison ship,” says Julie Winch in her book, A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten. To me, that was an amazing act of charity.

Interesting Oddities

• Forten was not James’s real name. A free Black man, he changed it from “Fortune,” which was a common name among slaves. In addi-
forten effectively used the power of the pen to fight racial injustice. in 1813, he anonymously wrote “letters from a man of colour on a late bill before the senate of pennsylvania.” this pamphlet strongly denounced a bill in the pennsylvania legislature requiring emigrating black people to register with the state. the bill failed.
He fought against slavery in many different ways. He spent half of his fortune purchasing the freedom of slaves. He financially supported William Lloyd Garrison’s paper, the *Liberator*, and also wrote for it. In addition, Forten’s home on Lombard Street served as a station for the Underground Railroad. And the American Antislavery Society was founded in his home.

He also left a powerful legacy: a family of activist children and their spouses, who kept the abolitionist movement going. He was a man who left the world far better than he found it. What more could anyone ask for?

**Fast Facts**

**Born:** September 2, 1766  
**Died:** March 4, 1842  
**Buried:** Eden Cemetery, Collingdale, Delaware County  
**Wrote:** “Letters from a Man of Colour on a Late Bill before the Senate of Pennsylvania”  
**Claim to Fame:** Prisoner of war, Black businessman, abolitionist, activist  
**Lived At:** 336 Lombard Street  
**Historical Marker Dedicated:** April 24, 1990  
**Marker Copy:** “A wealthy sailmaker who employed multi-racial craftsmen, Forten was a leader of the African-American community in Philadelphia and a champion of reform causes. The American Antislavery Society was organized in his house here in 1833.”  
**Nearby Attractions:** St. Peter’s Church, Old Pine Street Church, and Mother Bethel Church

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