

# Four Corners / Elsmere Historic Walking Tour



The Four Corners/Elsmere Historic Walking Tour was created by Isabella R., an Ambassador Girl Scout in Delmar Troop 166I, as her Gold Award Project.

*I have created a community self-guided Historic Walking Tour of Four Corners and Elsmere, and I have been working on this project, with Town Historian Susan Leath as my mentor, since August 2020. I view this Historic Walk as a means to build community bonds among residents; exercise and have fun outside; and provide people an opportunity to learn more about the history of the town we call home.*

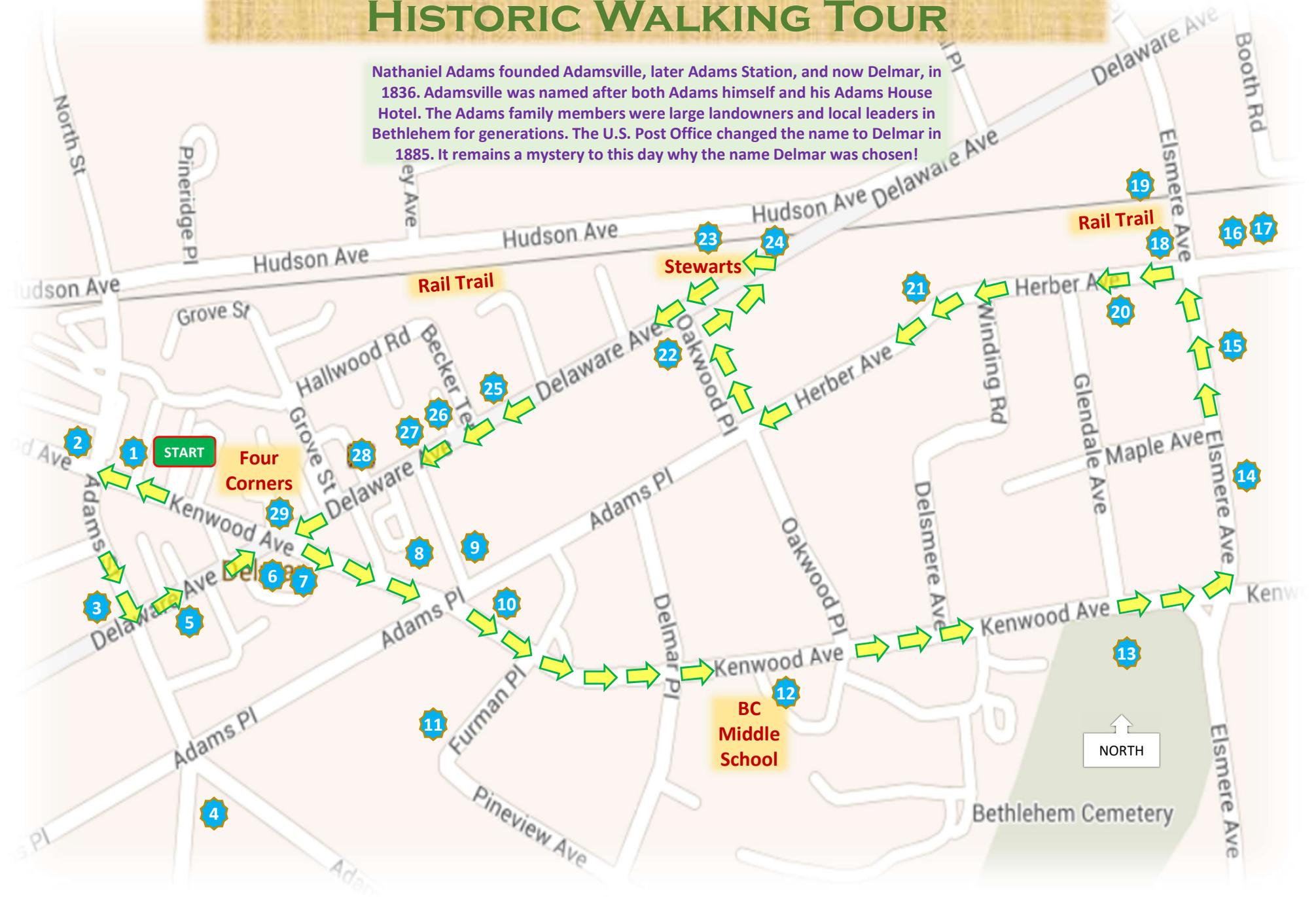
The Inaugural Walk was held on May 22, 2021, beginning at the Town parking lot, 407 Kenwood Avenue, near Four Corners.

You are invited to use this guide and take a walk through Bethlehem history.

Please give us your feedback after the walk by emailing [FourCornersElsmereWalk@gmail.com](mailto:FourCornersElsmereWalk@gmail.com)

# FOUR CORNERS / ELSMERE HISTORIC WALKING TOUR

Nathaniel Adams founded Adamsville, later Adams Station, and now Delmar, in 1836. Adamsville was named after both Adams himself and his Adams House Hotel. The Adams family members were large landowners and local leaders in Bethlehem for generations. The U.S. Post Office changed the name to Delmar in 1885. It remains a mystery to this day why the name Delmar was chosen!



PLEASE GIVE US FEEDBACK AFTER THE WALK,  
OR DIRECT ANY INQUIRIES TO –

[FourCornersElsmereWalk@gmail.com](mailto:FourCornersElsmereWalk@gmail.com)

ALSO LOOK FOR OUR QUICK LINK ON THE  
TOWN HISTORIAN'S WEBSITE

<https://www.townofbethlehem.org/151/Town-Historian>

**1 PETER HARRIS CLOTHES** (417 Kenwood Ave.) From 1940-1982, this was Sporthaven Bowling Alley, known for its bowling lanes, roller rink, and fun times!

**2 MASONIC LODGE** (421 Kenwood Ave.) Built in 1909, this former school replaced the District #10 one-room school house. It closed as a school in 1925 and the Bethlehem Masonic Lodge purchased it in 1929. As you look down Adams Street towards the rail trail, the passenger station on the Albany and Susquehanna Railroad (later the Delaware and Hudson) used to be on the right near the tracks. First known as Adams Station, the name Delmar Station came into use about 1886.

**3 BETHLEHEM CHABAD** (393 Delaware Ave.) This Greek Revival building was originally built in 1836 by Nathaniel Adams and called the Adams House Hotel. At one time a stagecoach stop, the building also hosted town meetings and gatherings. It served as the post office when Nathaniel Adams was Postmaster. The building was later purchased by the Delmar Fire Department, and then served as Bethlehem's Town Hall from 1950 to 1980. The rear portion, technically a separate building, still serves the fire department. In recent years, the building was purchased by Bethlehem Chabad, which was founded in 1985 by Rabbi Nachman Simon and Clare Simon.

**4 STRAM CENTER** (90 Adams Pl.) The Delmar Progress Club established the Delmar Free Library Association in 1913, with their first books housed as the District #10 schoolhouse. The library moved into its first building at this location on land from the George C. Adams Estate. The library, now the Bethlehem Public Library, outgrew the building here and moved to its current location on Delaware Avenue in 1972. Bethlehem Central Schools had their administrative offices here for years, before the property was sold to the Stram Center. Their new building opened in 2014.

**5 DELMAR REFORMED CHURCH** (386 Delaware Ave.) The church was built in 1841 as the East Branch of the Union Dutch Reformed Church. In 1848, the members of the church requested that the church become independent, and it became the 2nd Reformed Dutch Church in Bethlehem. In 1912, the name was changed to Delmar Reformed Church. The church has expanded since it was first built, to what it looks like today. The parsonage for the church is on the left, 384 Delaware Ave.

**6 I LOVE BOOKS** (380 Delaware Ave.) With its distinctive mansard roof, this building was constructed around 1905 by Esley Winnie. In about 1917, Earl Adams (a relative of Nathaniel Adams) and his wife bought this building and opened the Adams Hardware Store on the first level. It was also Delmar's Post Office for a time. Melissa Steen opened the current I Love Books store in 1990.

**7 HANNAGIN LAW FIRM** (388 Kenwood Ave.) Amazingly, this building was used as an engine house in the early days of the Delmar Fire Company. Beginning in 1911, fire apparatus was stored here. Alton C. Rowe, Sr., was named as the first Chief of the volunteer firefighters. Rowland Avenue is named after Rowe. In 1920, the Adams House Hotel was purchased to be used as the fire hall, and this building returned to other uses. For a while in the 1940s, it was Bethlehem's Town Hall.

**8 ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE CHURCH PARKING LOT** In 1923, The Rev. William C. Heffern watched over the building of a new Catholic church, next to where the present-day one stands. It served as the church until September 1962, when the current church was completed. The old church was torn down and replaced with a parking lot.

**9 ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE CHURCH** (35 Adams Pl.) The new Gothic church was dedicated in 1962. It features a stunning Gothic arch of limestone, crowned with a stained glass rose window. Parts of the old church were put in the new church, including the stained glass and chandeliers.

**10 ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE SCHOOL** (42 Adams Pl.) The congregation of St. Thomas Church wanted a school that taught their children their religious beliefs along with general educational subjects. The school began in 1956 in the basement of the first church. Later that year, the children went to the partially completed new school for kindergarten through fourth grade. Catholic sisters taught at the school, and lived in a convent that is now 360 Kenwood Ave. Originally, there were only one or two

teachers at the school who weren't sisters or priests. Now the school has all lay teachers.

**11 FURMAN PLACE** Likely named after Andrew and Ellen Furman who were former owners of the farmhouse at the end of Furman Place. It used to be called Furman Avenue, until 1935 when it was divided into Furman Place and Pineview Avenue. Isn't it interesting that in Bethlehem, so many streets are named after previous residents and families?

**12 BETHLEHEM MIDDLE SCHOOL** (332 Kenwood Ave.) This building was originally built in 1932 as the high school. After 20 years, the building became too small for the number of students. A new high school was completed in 1954 where the Bethlehem High School is currently. The building before you became the junior high school, and later the middle school. You can still see the words, "Bethlehem Central High School" carved on the facade.

**13 BETHLEHEM CEMETERY** was established in 1865. Many prominent local residents are buried here, including the Revolutionary War veteran, Christian Bender (1732-1808). Bender was born in Germany and came to America at 14 years of age. He lived on 300 acres of land in Bethlehem, which was on the Bender Lane of today. He had a large family with Elizabeth Cramer, and many of their children continued to call Bethlehem home. There are a number of other prominent families buried here including Groesbeck, Herber, and Salisbury. Nathaniel Adams Blanchard, for whom the Blanchard Veteran's Legion Post is named, is also buried here.

**14 ELSMERE AVENUE** Take a left turn onto Elsmere Avenue and continue up the block. Have you ever wondered where the name Elsmere originated? Well, in 1888, Mrs. Humphrey Ward wrote a novel named *Robert Elsmere*, which was a huge hit (akin to *Harry Potter* today). Most likely, this is where the name came from!

**15 ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH** (16 Elsmere Ave.) In 1908, a small group from Bethlehem met to discuss establishing an Episcopal mission in the town. St. Stephen's Episcopal Church was established in 1909 in temporary quarters in the unused Kunz's blacksmith shop located at the present site of the Veteran's Park, next to Stewart's. The new church, here in front of you, was completed in 1926 and has been added on to many times over the years. Over the entrance to the 1957 addition on the right is a distinctive sculpture of the major missionary saints of the Episcopal Church.

**16 ELSMERE SCHOOLHOUSE** (corner of Elsmere and Poplar, current location of the American Legion Post) The original Elsmere schoolhouse, District #15, was built in 1911, and was located where the American Legion Post currently stands. When the school opened, Ms. Mettie Sexton was both the teacher and principal. Students who continued on to high school had to take the train into Albany. When this school grew too small, the current Elsmere school on Delaware Avenue was built and opened in 1928. It had six classrooms for grades 1 to 6. It was considered a very modern school for the 1920s, and created a lot of excitement in the community due to its gymnasium, stage, fire alarms, and electric clocks!

**17 NATHANIEL ADAMS BLANCHARD POST OF THE AMERICAN LEGION** (16 West Poplar Dr.) This is a not-for-profit organization that was chartered by Congress in 1919. It is a Veterans organization devoted to helping the community and Veterans. It has donated over \$100,000, along with many volunteer hours, to programs supporting Veterans' organizations. The post was named after Nathaniel Adams Blanchard, who was believed to be the last American service member killed in France during WWI. He died Nov. 9, 1918.

**18 #1 HERBER AVENUE** Now a private home, this building was once a store/market, as well as serving for a time as the Elsmere Post Office.

**19 RAIL TRAIL** This bridge used to carry the Albany and Susquehanna Railroad (later the D&H) over Elsmere Avenue. It is now part of the Helderberg Hudson Albany County Rail Trail, which opened in 2011. When the railroad was first established here in 1863, it was a level grade crossing. Eventually, however, in order to avoid dangerous accidents, the roadway was dug out to go under the tracks. You can still walk up the original stairs (if you dare!!) built on either side of Elsmere Ave., up to the Post Office (1 Herber Ave.) on the left, and up to the Elsmere Rail Station on the right. The station, now long gone, was near the current Blanchard Post sign.

**20 #6 HERBER AVENUE** In 1886, John Herber and Anna Bradt moved here and raised their three children. They were very involved in village life. John was a well-known building developer and contractor in the Elsmere area. He was also a trustee of the Elsmere School, and was involved in Bethlehem's Water Commission. Anna's sister, Harriet, married John's brother, William.

**21 GROESBECK FARM** As you continue along Herber

Avenue, you are walking through the former Groesbeck farmland. John I. Groesbeck, born in 1795, and his family were prominent farmers in what is now Elsmere, in the 19th century and possibly before. He is a direct descendant of Nicholas Jacobse Claas Groesbeck, who like many Dutchmen, emigrated to the New World from the Netherlands in the mid-1650s. The intersection of Elsmere and Delaware Avenues was once called Groesbeck Corners. In 1935, the family's entire burial plot, including that of John I. Groesbeck himself, was moved to the Bethlehem Cemetery. Today, the family name is remembered in Elsmere by the street Groesbeck Place.

**22 FIRE ALARM BOX POST** As you stand at the crosswalk, on the southwest corner of Oakwood and Delaware Avenues, near Main Square, look behind the telephone pole and you will see what is most likely the last remaining cement fire alarm box post in Delmar. Before telephones were everywhere, fire alarm boxes were affixed to cement posts throughout the town to use in an emergency. This is Fire Alarm Box #126.

**23 STEWARTS** (309 Delaware Ave.) Charles and Caroline Kunz and their children came to Bethlehem sometime between 1860 and 1865. Charles Kunz was a blacksmith who established a blacksmith business next to his house. The house was where the Bethlehem Veterans Memorial Park is now located, and the blacksmith shop was where Stewart's is today. By 1881, both Charles and Caroline had died, and the blacksmith shop was closed. The building was used as a grocery store for a brief period of time before being left vacant again. Their family grave is in the Bethlehem Cemetery.

**24 BETHLEHEM VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK** (299 Delaware Ave) Dedicated in 1965, the park honors the men and women of the Town of Bethlehem who served in the military, including those who died in service to their country. A patriotic eagle sculpture, designed by Frank Litto, was placed atop the monument in 1965. In 2001, funds were raised with a buy-a-brick campaign to restore the park.

**25 333 CAFÉ BUILDING** (333 Delaware Ave.) This building is the former Delmar Theatre opened by the Jarvis brothers in 1929. The last movie showings were advertised in 1959, with the theater closing sometime thereafter.

**26 THE SPOTLIGHT** (341 Delaware Ave.) The Spotlight first appeared as a four-page long penny saver in 1953. It

was founded by Mr. Charles E. Walsh, Jr., with its offices on Rowland Ave. The paper was eventually sold to Richard Ahlsnom, who turned it into a 11-by-15-inch format. He sold it to Eagle Newspapers in 1998. It expanded through the purchase of other newspapers until there were 12 weekly news clips. Since its inception in 1953, it has always been called "The Spotlight."

**27 FORMER BANK BUILDING** (343 Delaware Ave.) Built in 1927 for the Bank of Bethlehem, Galen H. Nichols was the architect. The bank was acquired by National Commercial Bank and Trust Company in 1937. They later became part of Key Bank, which has a modern branch at 370 Delaware Avenue.

**28 DELMAR POST OFFICE** (357 Delaware Ave.) Completed in 1940, the Delmar Post Office was designed by Louis A. Simon and is on the National Register of Historic Places. Inside is a mural entitled "The Indian Ladder," created by artist Sol Wilson as part of the WPA (Works Progress Administration).

**29 YELLOW BRICKS AT FOUR CORNERS** While standing in front of Swifty's, look across Delaware Avenue and under the Kenwood Avenue sign, where you will see a batch of yellow bricks. Delaware Avenue was chartered as a turnpike road in 1805. At some point in the 1800s, it was paved with yellow bricks to improve road conditions. There is a legend that Edgar Allen Poe once saw this "yellow brick road" on a trip through Albany, and that sometime later, L. Frank Baum saw mention of it in a letter and decided to use the idea in his book, "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz."

