HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT FOR NORTH PLANNING DISTRICT

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Introduction

The North Philadelphia Planning District is a zone that, in contrast to other portions of what is now the city, had no historic early concentration of population analogous to the growth in Frankford or Germantown before the nineteenth century, and it was not marked by settlement before the establishment of the Pennsylvania Colony at the end of the seventeenth century. The territory of the district was relatively remote from settlements and village developments in Germantown, Frankford, Center City, and along the Delaware, and there was no easy access to this river for the transportation of people and goods. The two historic inland waterways in the Planning District, Wingohocking and Penn creeks, were not the focus of significant amounts of early industrial use because of this relative remoteness and the fact that they were the upper limits of their watersheds and therefore provided relatively low potential power.

The land of the Planning District lay in what were two townships within Philadelphia County. Most of the district was located in the Northern Liberties lands, whose northern limit was roughly at Wingohocking Street. A smaller portion of the district, the roughly triangular segment loosely bounded by Roosevelt Boulevard, Wingohocking Street, and Frankford Creek, lay in Bristol Township. In 1808, Penn Township was divided from Northern Liberties, with Germantown Avenue as the boundary, indicating growth between this road and the Schuylkill River.

The development of the Planning District began, as did most of the area of Philadelphia County, as country seats. Its early development was informed both by the fact that it was outside the original city but also by the fact that it was a place that lay between this early settlement and those at Frankford and Germantown. Thus, early roads, which were the first spines of development, gave way to the area’s first railroads, which connected not just these disparate locations in Philadelphia County, but also linked the city with key places further north and inland. The course of the future of the district was set by these railroads, and by the fact that it remained largely open into the third quarter of the nineteenth century. By the middle of the nineteenth century, industry had begun to infiltrate the district, and would continue to be developed there even into the mid-twentieth century.

Geographical Summary

The North Philadelphia Planning District (figure 1) takes up much of the area of the city where it widens north of Center City, and south of the point where the city branches to the northwest and northeast toward Germantown and Roxborough on the one hand and toward the Far Northeast on the other. The North Planning District is bounded on the west by the Schuylkill River, and Frankford Creek on the northeast, but does not span to the Delaware River on the east.
beyond Kensington Avenue. The district is characterized by relatively flat topography, with the notable exception of the steep Schuylkill River banks on the western edge of the district, the less steep banks of the Frankford Creek on the northeast (figure 2), and the relatively steep drop at the Roosevelt Boulevard that is partly manmade, and partly corresponding to the former bed of Falls Run. The Planning District is bounded on the south and southeast by Lehigh Avenue and Kensington Avenue, respectively, and by the Roosevelt Boulevard and Wingohocking Avenue on the north and northwest. Historically three streams were located in the district, all of which have been culverted. The first of these was Penn Brook, which ran into Gunner's Run, crossed the district, flowing west to east at around Westmoreland Street, originating just west of Germantown Avenue. Near the northern edge of the district, Wingohocking Creek also flowed west to east, beginning in the lower portion of Germantown and joining Frankford Creek at the end of Ramona Avenue today. At the far northwestern edge of the district, Falls Run ran roughly east-west into the Schuylkill River through the southern part of what is now known as East Falls. Like the land in the original city, however, the alluvial plain soils of the district historically contained sufficient clay to provide bricks for construction in addition to the trees that were felled in the area.

Figure 1. North Philadelphia Planning District, outlined in black.
First Period of Development: Country Estates and Crossroads Clusters: 1710s through the 1820s.

In contrast to portions of the city along the Schuylkill and the Delaware rivers, the area of the North Planning District was not a locus of European settlement before the advent of the Pennsylvania Colony. Instead, this portion of Philadelphia County became one characterized by two principal land uses in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. As an area between the main village settlements of Frankford and Germantown and the original city along the Delaware, it became a region in which estates of varying size were concentrated, and one in which a network of roads connected these areas of settlement to each other and to the Schuylkill River. This “betweenity” is easily seen in Thomas Holme’s 1687 map of the Pennsylvania Colony (figure 3). Both of these patterns are best documented in the eighteenth century by the famous Scull and Heap map (figure 4), which shows these roads, the historic creeks, and the estates that had been formed by the middle of the eighteenth century in this region. While these roads connected portions of the region, they were of insufficient quality to move goods manufactured by mills along the creeks in the waterways in the district, and the relatively inland nature and flat topography of the district were not conducive to a significant amount of water power on which to place these mills. A saw mill located at the mouth of Falls Run and one near the northern edge of the district are the only two shown by Scull and Heap.
Figure 2: Detail, Thomas Holme’s 1687 *Map of the Improved Part of Pennsylvania*, showing the Northern Liberties between Frankford, Germantown, and the original city.
The largest, the first, and arguably the best known of these estates was Fairhill, developed by Isaac Norris. The property was named for the Quaker Meeting house that was established on or near the “fair hill” that was a higher piece of ground than its surroundings, and, more particularly, higher than ground to the south and east, and therefore afforded a view of the settlements in the city and along the Delaware. The meeting itself had been built about 1707, on a lot that was given by William Penn to Quaker theologian George Fox’s estate in 1703 in lieu of acreage he had promised Fox in Pennsylvania. Fox’s estate’s lot was given to the Society of Friends for a house of worship. With respect to the donation of the lot to Fox, Penn wrote to his proprietary representative, James Logan, and June of that year, noting that he would “willingly allow a field of twenty acres, or twenty-five acres for Friends’ use, out of liberty lands, near any meeting; but to allow it out of the city lots is what I will never do, unless I was on the spot”: Penn resented the use of a “High” (Market) Street lot which he had reserved for Tishe,” which had been taken for a meeting house (presumably the one at 2nd Street).1 Thus, the Fairhill meeting house was established in the Northern Liberties on the “Germantown Road” (Germantown Avenue) – the main thoroughfare between the city settlement along the Delaware and the Germantown village to its northwest. In the 1870s, antiquarian Thompson Westcott recorded the building, which still stood at that point, as “twenty-five feet in length by fifteen in depth, and is built of red and black bricks, with the black bricks on the rear side arranged in lozenge shapes [i.e., diaper work].” The interior was noted as “one room, rising to the pitched roof, the timbers of which are painted red,” and that there was “a small gallery on each side – one for men, the other for women.” During the eighteenth century the property included a small burying ground; a larger cemetery was created later (see below).2

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the earliest portion of the brick building of Trinity Church, Oxford (see Historic Context Statement for the Lower Northeast Planning District) by about five years.

Isaac Norris’s Fairhill estate itself was by far the largest property in the area of the Planning District, and in fact the largest estate developed in Philadelphia County in the eighteenth century. Norris’s large, H-plan estate house stood just south of the boundary of the Planning District, and was located between York, Cumberland, 6th and 7th streets. Further, only a relatively small portion of this estate lay in the territory that is now the North district; most of Norris’s extensive acreage was located to the south and east, stretching beyond Frankford Avenue to the edge of Gunner’s Run around the location of Aramingo Avenue today.3

 Norris, who had made a substantial fortune as a merchant, began the amassing of land for Fairhill in 1709. On it, he built what was for the period a large house, as well as secondary buildings and gardens. Norris moved to his country property as his permanent residence in 1717, where he pursued progressive agriculture and lived grandly, if relatively plainly compared to his English counterparts as befitted this observant Quaker, in “rural retirement.”4

 Norris’s efforts were followed by those of his friend and associate James Logan, William Penn’s proprietary representative, who, like Norris, stood at the apex of Pennsylvania Quaker culture in their close relationship to Penn, their political power, and their wealth. As is the case for Fairhill, Logan’s “plantation,” for which he began to purchase land in 1711, and which he named Stenton, lay partly in what is now the North Planning District. Also like Fairhill, much of the Logan acreage, as well as the main “mansion house”, completed about 1728, lay outside the Planning District – in this case to its north. Stenton survives to the present as a historic house museum at 18th and Windrim Streets adjacent to Stenton Park, which is the last remnant of open space corresponding to the former Logan estate.

 Both Stenton and Fairhill stood to the east of the Germantown Road. Their mansion houses were accessed from it by an axial avenue running roughly north-south from this important road. During the eighteenth century, the development of estates in what was to become the North Planning District was related to the network of diagonal roads that crossed this area, of which the Germantown Road was only one. As was typical of early development throughout Philadelphia County, these diagonal, linking roads became the spines of development of the early estates that closely followed the creation of Fairhill and Stenton. While some of the early land owners were fellow prominent Quakers, such as members of the Waln and Richey families, wealthy Philadelphians of other denominations and therefore cultural affiliations developed estates in the district. For example, Anglicans Thomas Venables, and the better known important early medical doctor Thomas Bond had country estates near to each other west of the Germantown Road. Other

4 See Reinberger and McLean.
landowners also amassed property without developing it. For example Peter Keen, a descendent of one of the Swedish founders of the Upland (later Chester) settlement, owned over 200 acres, but, like his relative Matthias Keen who owned significant amounts of Oxford Township to the east, did not occupy it and instead lived along the Delaware rather than inland.5

The Germantown Road (Germantown Avenue) was one of four principal thoroughfares that were created beginning in the late seventeenth century and which connected the original city with points north, and all of which survive in the modern city's streets. The Frankford Road (Frankford Avenue) led northeast paralleling the Delaware, the Ridge Road (Ridge Avenue) ran northwest roughly paralleling the Schuylkill, and the York Road (Old York Road) branched straight north from the Germantown Road – fanning out as they moved north through Northern Liberties and Bristol townships. In the Northern Liberties Township, including the area that is now the North Planning District, other roads connected these main roads to each other for strategic reasons: in the district, an important road ran roughly east-west connecting Frankford to Germantown north of Eerie Avenue. It eventually became known as the Nicetown Lane, and was eliminated from the city landscape in the early twentieth century. Another road led from the Schuylkill to the Germantown Road. This was later to become Hunting Park Avenue. The area where these two cross roads met the Germantown Road became an important site for early development. The Rising Sun Tavern, the only early way station in the vicinity, was located near there, at the point where Rising Sun Avenue, Old York Road, and Germantown Avenue meet today.

The land immediately north of the tavern, extending up to the point where what is now Rising Sun Avenue meets Germantown Avenue, was owned in the eighteenth century by members of the Nice family. The original settler was one of two French Huguenot brothers who had fled France in the late seventeenth century for the Netherlands before emigrating to Philadelphia. The two brothers, Jan and Hans Neus or de Neus probably originally were simply known as “de Neisse” (“of Neisse”), and were prominent founding members of the Germantown Mennonite congregation. Their last name was Anglicized during the eighteenth century to “Nice.” Jan, or John, a silversmith, lived in Germantown, but Hans, a printer, settled in Northern Liberties Township between Fairhill and Stenton.6 By the period of the Revolution, several members of the Nice family owned adjacent tracts in this area, indicating the subdivision of lands to heirs according to the Dutch custom instead of the English system of primogeniture. In contrast to the wealthy settlers of British extraction such as Logan and Norris, who approached the creation of their estates in the spirit of Virgilian otium as country retreats, and maintained ties to the original city even after they “retired” to the country to live there permanently, their neighbors the Nice family settled their land as their primary residence,


and were connected to Germantown. Those who settled close to Frankford Creek in the district may have been connected to this village as well. As an exception to the general pattern of estate development, and as the Scull and Heap map indicates, there were also two areas in which smaller landholdings and denser development occurred by the middle of the eighteenth century: one close to the Rising Sun and also along the road from the Schuylkill.

The estates established in the eighteenth century in the Planning District suffered significantly during the Revolution, as much if not more than in other regions of Philadelphia County. In 1777, the British burned multiple houses in the area, including Fairhill. Deborah Norris Logan, granddaughter of the Isaac Norris and wife of James Logan’s grandson George, recalled seeing “seventeen fires” from the roof of her family’s house on Chestnut Street, including one at Fairhill.” Fairhill was rebuilt, but as a 1-story house on a reduced footprint.

In the period after the Revolution, two important development trends in the area outside of the original city and its growing extension along the Delaware River affected the area of the planning district. The first of these was the growth of the Schuylkill River as a fashionable villa district. This complemented the continued use of the inland portion of the district as a well-established area of estates. John Hills’s 1808 *Plan of the City of Philadelphia and Environs* (figure 5), indicates that the area of the planning district continued to be one of country estate development in its inland section in the period after the Revolution. The Hills map shows properties in the planning district in this period such as “Auburn Hill” near the intersection of Front Street and Glenwood Avenue, “Neptune Hill,” close to “Neptune Vale” located approximately in the bed of Roosevelt Boulevard where Wissahickon Avenue crosses it, and “Fair View” near where 5th Street crosses Allegheny Avenue today.

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Along the Schuylkill, where estates had been established just as they had in the planning district in general in the eighteenth century before the Revolution, the period after the war brought the concentration of fashionable suburban retreats to the river’s banks. One of the crucial differences between the developments before and after the war along the river was the number of merchants who built architecturally up-to-date houses on relatively small lots, in contrast to the large landholdings with a significant agricultural component that were created before the war following the model of Fairhill and Stenton. After the war, the Woodlands took the lead with William Hamilton’s remodeling in the early 1780s. Although Schuylkill River frontage within the planning district was, and still is relatively small, it is an area that is important as the northern limit of the post-Revolutionary suburban villa district, which effectively ended at the falls of the Schuylkill. The falls, which technically still exist, are located just downstream of the bridges that cross the river connecting the Schuylkill Expressway to Roosevelt Boulevard where the river bends sharply at the foot of S. Ferry Road at the edge of the planning district, but have not been visible since the level of the river was raised by the completion of the dam at the Fairmount Waterworks about 1820.

Within the planning district, two country seats were located near the river’s edge. The northern of the two was created by the merchant Joseph Sims and was named the Laurels. Immediately to the south was Fairy Hill, owned by another merchant, George Pepper. The character of the riverfront in this period can easily be seen in William Birch’s *Mendenhall Ferry*, included in his *Country Seats of the United States* of 1808 (figure 6).

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The second important trend that would affect the development of the planning district was what was called at the time “internal improvements”; a term used in the period of the American early republic to denote the construction of roads, canals, lighthouses, water systems, turnpikes, and other such developments, including the laying out of land for subdivision. Today we would probably place these activities under the much more prosaic category of “infrastructure”; in the decades following the Revolution, however, these improvements were thought of as being literally the stuff of nation-building, and were perceived as the means of creating a new country that would rival more established (European) civilizations.

Within the planning district, this trend manifested itself primarily in the form of the creation of turnpikes from existing roads, thus substantially improving travel conditions both in and through the district. In 1824, these roads were described in glowing terms that made clear their strategic economic role:

Figure 6. William Russell Birch, Mendenhall Ferry, from The Country Seats of the United States, 1808. The Laurels is shown left of center and Fairy Hill at right.
Artificial roads have been constructed on the principal routes of the internal trade with Philadelphia. These works have been undertaken and completed by private associations, generally without aid from the legislatures, and by means of funds furnished from this city [i.e., Philadelphia]. In the strength and solidity of their execution, and the amount of money expended on them, these roads are not equaled by any works of the same description in the United States.  

These roads were developed by private enterprises which were financed both through the public offering of shares and toll collection. In 1801, the charter was granted for the Philadelphia, Germantown, and Perkiomen Turnpike Road, which upgraded the Germantown Road within the planning district. The Philadelphia, Cheltenham, and Willow-Grove Turnpike took on the York Road, and was begun in 1803. Over a decade later, the Ridge Turnpike was begun, improving the Ridge Road beginning in 1811. As the Hills map indicates (figure 5), toll collection took place in the district at the point where the road across the district that would become Hunting Park Avenue crossed the Germantown and York Road turnpikes.

The Hills map also indicates that another “internal improvement” typical of the early national period that was attempted in the planning district but not completed. Specifically, the map shows the line of a “proposed canal” that would have connected and channelized Falls Run and the Cohocksink Creek, which was key to early industrial development along the Delaware River waterfront in what is now known as the Northern Liberties neighborhood. This canal, never completed, would have linked the Schuylkill River above the falls to the Delaware, facilitating the movement of goods from inland areas to Philadelphia’s port on the latter river, thus giving the city’s merchants an advantage over the growing ports of New York and Baltimore.

In addition to showing the improved roads and proposed canals within the district, the Hills map also indicates the effect that these “internal improvements” were beginning to have in this area. Specifically, the map shows several taverns that had not appeared on the mid-eighteenth century Scull and Heap map, indicating increased traffic through the district. At the intersection of Knights Lane and Township Line Road (Hunting Park Avenue and Wissahickon Avenue) stood the Indian Hunter. To the north and east, where Knights Lane crossed the Germantown Turnpike, the Weiss Inn was found. The Rising Sun still stood at the point where the York Road began at the Germantown Turnpike, and the Fox Chase Tavern was located not far to its south, where the Germantown Turnpike crossed the end of Penn Brook north of the Fairhill Meetinghouse.

It is clear from the Hills map that before the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, development of a different sort was also beginning to appear in the district. At the crossroads on the Germantown Turnpike where the Weiss Tavern was located, and where the Nice family had owned property since the early eighteenth century, an area of denser development had occurred that had acquired the name of “Nicetown.” In fact, the name first appears in Philadelphia

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newspapers in the mid-1790s, suggesting this development first dates to at least this period.\(^\text{12}\) To the south of this, near the Rising Sun tavern, “Sun-Ville” had sprung up. The Reverend Samuel F. Hotchkin would later recall that the Rising Sun Tavern became, in essence “the cattle market of Philadelphia” in this period, when “cattle were driven here from the state of New York before live stock passed over railway tracks.”\(^\text{13}\) The Hills map makes clear that these two areas consisted of buildings, presumably mostly houses, located both much closer to the road and to each other than the estate houses that characterized the earlier period of development of the district. This new development was close in character to the pattern of construction in Germantown. Today, there are almost no remnants on the ground that recall this period of construction, with the exception of 4128-4130 Germantown Avenue, which is listed in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Accompanying this diversification of types of development was the appearance of a number of schools in the area: a boarding school was found in Nicetown and the Clairemont School stood on the east-west road from Frankford to Nicetown. Clairemont (also spelled Clermont and Clairmont) Academy was founded in 1806 by John and Charles Carré, Roman Catholics from Normandy, who also maintained a school at 11th and Market streets in the city. In 1892, Samuel F. Hotchkin termed the school “famous in its day” and described it as a stone building that had been destroyed by fire by that point.\(^\text{14}\) An article published in the *Port Folio* magazine in 1810 illustrated the building (figure 7), discussed the founders of the school, its physical situation, and curriculum. The article noted that the “liberal seminary [a term that connoted study in seminars rather than religious training at the time]” was “in the immediate vicinity” of Philadelphia, “situated on the Frankford road to Germantown.” The location was characterized as “lofty,” and “command[ing] an extended and enchanting prospect [-] the salubrity of the air, the liberty of the pleasure grounds, and the charms of the landscape, all contribute to the health and comfort of the pupil.”\(^\text{15}\) In 1828, the school was taken over by Samuel Griscom as a Quaker boys’ boarding school.\(^\text{16}\) Interestingly, Hills depicted no churches in the district other than the Fairhill Meeting.

One of the features of the area that Hills did not represent was one that would have a lasting effect on the Planning District, at least in name. As early as 1807, the first race-course in Philadelphia city or county was established near Nicetown in a portion of the Logan estate by S. Allen. It was later called Hunting Park, giving the name to the place as well as the road leading to it.\(^\text{17}\)

Although this new level of development in the early nineteenth century was notable for the history of the North Planning District area, it was apparently not considered particularly remarkable in the period in comparison to what was occurring in other sections of Philadelphia County. In

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\(^\text{12}\) See, for example, a notice published by the *Federal Gazette* in Philadelphia on 26 November 1793 by George Wiles, who records his location as “Nice-Town.”


\(^\text{15}\) Anon., “Clermont Seminary. – for the Port Folio,” *Port Folio* 4, no. 5 (November 1810): 492.


contrast to the growth in other portions of the County in the first decades of the nineteenth century, there was apparently little to note in what was to become the Planning District. In 1811, in a section of his guide book *Picture of Philadelphia* that presented “Tours of the Vicinity of Philadelphia,” James Mease gives visitors, for example, an account of the scenery on the west side of the original city, to its south, and of sites such as the glass works that a tourist would encounter going up the Delaware River shore from Philadelphia. In contrast, in a tour of the “North Route” to Germantown, the turnpike is noted as the means of getting to this “healthful village,” where “woolen hosiery” is manufactured “in the families of the German settlers.” The village is also characterized as a “summer retreat for a number of citizens.”\(^{18}\) Nothing, however, is discussed by the author in the Northern Liberties except the road to Germantown itself.

![Figure 7. Clermont School, from the *Port Folio* magazine, 1810.](image)

Second Period of Development: Railroads, Industrial and Residential Development to the arrival of the Boulevard, 1830s to 1900s.

While the establishment of Nicetown and Sunville are important as a sign of a move toward increased urbanization in the future North Planning District, the most significant change in the district to influence the shape of events in the nineteenth century occurred in the 1830s: the arrival of the railroad. In the decades after the Revolution, Philadelphians had pinned their hopes on the development of canals as a key means of competing for market share of inland goods. The development of the Schuylkill Navigation system was arguably the most important of these ventures. By 1826, more than half of the freight brought into Philadelphia by this system was coal, mostly from Schuylkill County mines.¹⁹

Coal, of course, was key, and Josiah White’s 1815 discovery of the potential for anthracite was crucial not only for the development of Philadelphia’s industry in general, but for the North Planning District in particular. The turnpikes of the early nineteenth century began to change the rate and type of development within the district. The exploitation of coal for steam power would not only come to power railroad locomotives through the district, but also would allow Philadelphia’s industrial facilities to no longer be confined to locations where water power was available. Because of the geographic location of the district as a zone between the rivers, the original city, Germantown, and Frankford, and its relatively flat topography, it became the place where the earliest rail lines crossed Philadelphia County to link these places. Thus, both industry and railroad moved into the district, and the stage was set for increasingly urbanized development in the nineteenth century.

The 1830s brought the beginning of the shift from canal-based transportation to rail-based systems. The first railroad completed in the city was the Philadelphia, Germantown, and Norristown line, financed to a significant extent by Germantown residents. The Norristown branch was completed to Manayunk in 1835 and the branch to Germantown not long after.²⁰ The location of the tracks of these two lines, now the Norristown and Chestnut Hill East, have essentially remained the same since the time of their completion, with a split of the two at N. 7th Street and Indiana Avenue. At the time of their initial construction, the lines originated from 9th and Willow Streets just north of the original city because railroads were not yet permitted into the city.

One of the most significant events to shape the history not only of the district but also of the city of Philadelphia and beyond was the completion by the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company of a rail line from Reading and the Pennsylvania coal country to a coal depot on the Delaware River.²¹ This coal depot, located in Port Richmond, was opened after the Reading

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Railroad completed the five mile connector from the Schuylkill at East Falls in 1842.22 Within two years, the Coal Depot’s exports had surpassed the quantity of anthracite coal coming to the city from the Pennsylvania coal fields via the Schuylkill River Navigation canal. The Coal Depot served as the primary point of coal distribution and export for the city until coal was eclipsed by other fuel sources. The Reading line also crossed through the Planning District, running roughly parallel to the Germantown Turnpike, through the small village of Nicetown, and then turning southwest toward the Schuylkill River roughly parallel to Nicetown Lane (Hunting Park Avenue). The right-of-way and tracks for this line still exist today (figure 8).

Figure 8. Detail, August Kollner, Route of a Proposed Railroad from Powelton, West Philada. to the Philada. Gas Works . . . , 1856. The path of the early railroads through the Planning District can be clearly seen on this mid-nineteenth-century plan.

Growth in the city south of the Planning District and increasing demand for coal led to another rail line being established in the district before the Civil War: the North Pennsylvania Railroad. The purpose of this line was to connect the city with the Lehigh coal region. The North Penn line was formally opened in 1855, running north-south through the Planning District at American Street.

In contrast to the advent of the railroads in the district beginning in the 1830s, a very different sort of development was taking place along the Schuylkill River in the same period: the creation of Laurel Hill Cemetery, the city’s first rural cemetery, the nation’s first such landscape to be designed by a professional (John Notman), and the second in the nation after Mt. Auburn outside of Boston. The first section of Laurel Hill to be completed was the former Sims estate. The adjacent Fairy Hill was not purchased as part of the cemetery until 1861.23 Laurel Hill was the first of several cemeteries to be established in the planning district. Among those that followed soon after the establishment of Laurel Hill was the expanded Fair Hill burial ground, which was laid out in the early 1840s for the use of Hicksite Quakers after they were no longer welcome to use existing burial grounds in the city, which were under the control of Orthodox Friends after the 1827 schism. Fairhill Burying Ground was expanded in the 1850s to meet the needs of the three Hicksite Quaker meetings in the city: Green Street, Spruce Street, and Race Street.24 Mt. Vernon, immediately adjacent to Laurel Hill across Ridge Avenue was chartered in 1856.25 On the east side of the district, the Roman Catholic “New” Cathedral Cemetery (the first was in West Philadelphia) was begun in 1868, followed by Greenmount Cemetery, which was founded in 1875.

In some respects, the establishment of Laurel Hill was a continuation of the elite landscape of the estates that comprised much of the Planning District in the period that preceded Laurel Hill’s creation, since it was a place that attracted some of the city’s most illustrious former citizens. Another manifestation of this elite occupation near Laurel Hill was the creation of St. James-the-Less in the 1840s. Now a National Historic Landmark, St. James reflects the interests of landowner Robert Ralston, and the expectation that a wealthy Episcopalian congregation would be present in the area to fill its pews.26 Rather than a harbinger of a continuation of the wealthy estate occupation of the Planning District that had been the predominant land use up to that point in the Planning District, St. James marks the beginning of the end of the period when country seats would continue to be established in the area.

In the years between the completion of the railroad lines, the first section of Laurel Hill, and the Consolidation of Philadelphia City and County and 1854, development proceeded relatively slowly in the Planning District, but signs of expansion and greater density were beginning to appear. In an 1849 guide book to the city, the villages that had appeared by the turn of the century were clearly continuing to grow. “Sunville” or “Rising Sun,” located “at the junction of the Germantown

26 See National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Church of St.-James-the-Less.
and Old York roads,” was characterized as “quite a large and thriving place.” Nicetown was termed “a neat little village, on the Germantown Road, about four miles from the city”; by 1855, the village had a second street – Nice Street – that survives to the present day. St. Stephen’s Catholic Church had also been established there. “Schuylkill Falls” was noted as “an active manufacturing village” which lay “a short distance beyond Laurel Hill.”

27 Charles Ellett’s 1843 map of the city and county shows two mills located along Fall’s Run in this period. In 1857, the factories in this area, still water-powered in this period, would include the first mill constructed by John and James Dobson. The Dobson Mills would come to dominate this portion of the Planning District with their textile manufacturing complex from the period of the Civil War; it would continue to operate until the eve of the Great Depression.

28 The period of the Consolidation brought the first major industrial facilities to the planning district. In 1854, James Carmichael built an oil cloth factory at a location corresponding today to the east side of 2nd Street between Erie Avenue and Venango Street. Carmichael had work in partnership with Thomas Potter, who, in turn, had worked for Isaac Macauley, the individual responsible for bringing oil cloth production to the United States by establishing a manufactory in Philadelphia in 1816. Potter and Carmichael opened a factory on Third Street in the Northern Liberties neighborhood in 1840, and dissolved their partnership in 1853. After Carmichael’s death in 1867, Potter took over the factory, rebuilding it in 1870 and continuing to expand and operate this facility into the twentieth century after bringing his sons into the company. In 1891, the Potter complex was described as “the largest and most complete [oil-cloth manufacturing] establishment in the United States, and probably the world.” At this point, it had “a capacity equal to the production of 1,500,000 yards of furniture and carriage cloth, and 1,000,000 square yards of floor oil-cloth, annually.” Not surprisingly, Potter was one of Philadelphia’s leading industrialists in the period after the Civil War.

29 The Carmichael/Potter factory was not alone in bringing industry into the area of the Planning District in the period before the end of the Civil War. By 1855, a varnish factory, Benjamin C. Horner & Co., lay close by to the south and east (figure 9). Horner was in the business of manufacturing varnishes for wholesale at 81 Arch Street by 1853, but when he exhibited his products at America’s first world’s fair, the Crystal Palace exhibition in New York City, but it is not known where his factory was until 1856, when he advertised in a Philadelphia city directory.

Figure 9. Details, J. D. Scott, *Map of the Consolidated City of Philadelphia, 1855*, showing grid extension and developments at Franklinville / Cooperville. The Carmichael and Horner factories are right of center in the lower image.

Horner advertised his factory as being located at “Cooperville,” Philadelphia. Cooperville, or Coopersville, is a name that still persists in some sources to the present as a Philadelphia
neighborhood name for this part of the Planning District. It arose from association with James E. Cooper, a landowner in the area and the proprietor of the Rising Sun Tavern.33

J. D. Scott’s 1855 Map of the Consolidated City of Philadelphia (figure 9) also indicates another name that arose for this portion of the Planning District. Just to the west and south of the Carmichael and Horner factories “Franklin” appears. Some forty years after Scott’s map, the Reverend Samuel Hotchkin recalled that “Cooperville” area was also known as “Franklinville,” and that it had been the subject of a plan to develop it by the Franklin Land Company, “one of the first Mutual Land Companies in the city,” in the middle of the nineteenth century. Later maps locate these two as distinct areas, with Franklinville to the north and slightly west of Cooperville. Hotchkin recorded that the 72-acre tract was subdivided into 1000 lots, with a minimum 20 foot frontage, and that “the lots were taken rapidly” despite the fact that “no railway then touched Franklinville.” The president of the land company, John Turner, purchased an existing, pre-Revolutionary era country house there, “with a country look, though brick houses were near it, and a large factory not far distant.” Finally, Hotchkin asserts that Turner “planned and worked for years to make Franklinville an industrial center, and he lived to realize his expectations,” strongly suggesting that he recruited Carmichael and Horner to the development.34 The Franklinville name, however, apparently predates the mid-century by at least a decade, although perhaps in Germantown rather than in the territory of the Planning District – an 1839 advertisement that appeared in Philadelphia’s Public Ledger offered an “old established tavern and lot of ground in Franklinville, Germantown, near the 7 mile stone, and opposite the Lutheran Church.”35 The fact that neither Cooperville nor Franklinville appeared in the 1849 guide book description of villages in the area suggests that these terms were relatively new at the time of the Consolidation and confirms Hotchkin’s account.

Regardless of the precise origin of these names and their geographic application, what is clear from Scott’s map is that an appreciable number of buildings had been constructed between the Carmichael and Horner factories and the Germantown Turnpike by 1855 in connection with Turner’s Franklinville, and presumably related at least in part to the increased work available there from the factories. In addition to houses and the factories, a church was located in the area. Further, and more significantly, these new buildings were oriented to the projected continuation of the Center City grid, which is shown in Scott’s map far beyond the level of its completion by this date. The Consolidation was beginning to bring the city into the territory of the Planning District.

33 Hotchkin, The York Road, pp. 29; 35.
34 Hotchkin, The York Road, pp. 35-6.
35 Public Ledger, 7 June 1839, p. 3.
Figure 10. Detail, R. L. Barnes, *Map of the Whole Incorporated City of Philadelphia*, 1865, showing the location of Cooperville / Coopersville, Franklinville, the extent of development of Rising Sun at this date, and the former lanes connecting these clusters.

While the city grid shown on Scott’s map below Loudon Street was more imagined than real, this map also shows the development within the Planning District above this boundary. At another important crossroads, where the former Fisher’s Lane (that led form the Fisher family estate, Wakefield, to the point near the confluence of Wingo hocking and Frankford creeks, another cluster had formed: Feltonville. This crossroads settlement stood north of a concrete example of the projected speculative development of the region: a large lot was held by the “North Philadelphia Villa Association.”

Although the area around it was yet to be developed fully, the period before the Civil War also saw the creation of the first public park in the Planning District. Although the Hunting Park course had seen renowned trotters race there, the enactment of laws that prohibited horseracing meant that the property had gradually become abandoned. With the arrival of the Consolidation, a group of “gentlemen, some of whom were interested in real estate in the vicinity of the old race course, joined together to purchase the ground, with the intention of presenting it to the city, to be used as a public park.”36 Thus, Hunting Park was seen as a key amenity to grow this area.

Despite the aspirations of Mr. Turner and the “gentlemen” who created Hunting Park, both industrial and residential development in the Planning District proceeded relatively slowly after the Civil War, but before the end of the war key infrastructure was beginning to be completed to make this development possible. Samuel Smedley’s 1862 atlas of the city shows that a city reservoir had been created in the block bounded by 6th, 7th and Somerset streets and Lehigh Avenue. More importantly, railroad stations had been established in the Planning District. On the Philadelphia, Germantown and Norristown Railroad, the train stopped near Tioga and 20th streets, and on the North Penn Railroad, at Franklinville near 4th and Glenwood streets. Further, a horse car line had been completed up Broad Street (which had been laid out), turned onto Tioga, then up 17th Street before it turned off toward Roxborough at Pike Street. Access clearly spurred construction. The area around Tioga Station had been laid out with streets and buildings had begun to be constructed on them. Just to the north of this Tioga area, another on projected development, “Kenderton” had been started to the southwest of Nicetown, which had expanded to the northeast with additional streets paralleling Germantown. Nicetown now included a Baptist Church and a school. Rising Sun had also developed a secondary street paralleling Germantown, Goodman Street, which survives to the present (see figure 10).

In 1866, an important industrial facility at a much larger scale than the earlier oil cloth and varnish works was established in the area of the district: the Fitler, Weaver & Co. Rope and Cordage Factory at Germantown Avenue and 10th Street. One observer noted in 1881 that its long rope walk, which reached Lehigh Avenue, stretched “so far away to the N. E. that it seems as long as an old-times sailor’s yarn.” This new factory, along with the company’s earlier one in Kensington, produced a reported seven tons of product daily and employed 300 men. The North Philadelphia factory was described in 1868 as being “so complete, [with] machinery so perfect, that the Cordage cannot be surpassed in quality by any made in the world.” Edwin Fitler, the firm’s senior partner, designed the factory, and “established a private telegraphic wire from the store on Water street to the Factory, which passes directly through his house in the city.”

The late 1860s also saw the creation of one of the most important factories in Philadelphia within the district: Midvale Steel. Beginning in 1868, the William Butcher Steel Works were built at Nicetown immediately to the west of the crossing of the Philadelphia, Germantown and Norristown line and the Reading Railroads line at Nicetown, providing direct access to the coal moving across the city and the shipment of its products. By 1875, a significant siding yard was connected to the factory. The principal investor in the company, engineer William Sellers, would take over the company after forcing Butcher out. Midvale Steel would become the birthplace of scientific management, a philosophy of industrial process developed by Midvale Steel employee and Sellers

protégé Frederick Winslow Taylor and continue operation into the 1970s. In 1874, the first buildings of the Blabon Oil Cloth Works were built immediately adjacent to Midvale Steel to the west, sealing the fate of Nicetown as an industrial hub.\footnote{Hexamer survey, 1878, http://www.philageohistory.org/rdic-images/view-image.cfm/HGSv14.1259-1260, accessed 27 July 2012.} Eventually, the Link Belt Engineering Company would join this group at the point of the rail crossing. By 1875, most of the construction in the Nicetown/Tioga area was of a suburban character, however, with free-standing or double houses and virtually no rowhouse construction.\footnote{Hopkins, \textit{City Atlas of Philadelphia, Vol. 2, 21st & 28th Wards} (Philadelphia, 1875), plate O.}

By 1875, another crucial element of the Planning District’s infrastructure had been created: the Connecting Railroad linked the Pennsylvania Railroad’s West Philadelphia depot with its line paralleling the Delaware connecting to Trenton and New York. This would eventually become the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad across North Philadelphia and remains the Amtrak line today. The line passed through the middle of Cooperville (figure 11) With the completion of this connecting line, the main railroads through the Planning District were complete and the groundwork laid for the creation of more industrial construction with this provision of the means of moving goods. The “Intersecting Station,” located where the Connecting Railroad crossed the Philadelphia, Germantown, and Norristown lines, would eventually become North Philadelphia Station.
In the 1870s and 1880s, the large amount of open land of the district (which was unavailable in further east in Kensington and Northern Liberties at this point), coupled with the access this land provided to railroad transportation led to the creation of other large industrial complexes. For example, beginning in 1872, the Peerless Brick factory stretched immediately to the south of
Hunting Park Avenue along Old York Road. From 1888, George V. Cresson’s foundry was located near 18th Street and Allegheny Avenue and the “Intersecting Station.”

Despite this growing industrial construction, in 1875, further east beyond what was now called Germantown Avenue, the land of the Planning District remained sparsely developed, with a patchwork of larger estates interspersed with blocks of streets laid out and houses developed. Between 1875 and the turn of the century, development continued to occur according to the patterns already established:

The extent and character of development in the district is graphically illustrated by an aerial perspective map published in 1887 (figure 12). In this, the historic villages of Nicetown and Rising Sun are clearly visible, as are the newer clusters of Franklinville and Tioga. A number of older estate houses can be seen on Nicetown Lane, as well as the such industrial facilities as Midvale Steel and Peerless Brick. It is clear that the dense, rowhouse development of areas further south had only begun to infiltrate above Lehigh Avenue at this point, and then, only in relatively small portions.

In 1892 Samuel Hotchkin, in describing the journey through this area by train toward Jenkintown, still characterized the landscape around Erie Avenue as “true and loving country with its ever sweet and genial face” beyond “the broken lots, and detached buildings whose brick walls however have still a city look, and whose angular sides seem to call for brick blocks of residences to hold them up, and keep company.” At this point, he felt he was beyond “the ragged lines of suburban lots half town and half country where brick yards love to dwell.” He noted that “at Erie Avenue a neat two-story station, colored yellow, has a small piazza to shelter the waiting traveler, and a friendly tree gives its shade in the summer.” Just beyond this bucolic scene lay the Drove Yard Hotel, with “adjoining cattle sheds” where Philadelphia’s butchers gathered – the successor to the cattle market at Rising Sun of an earlier period.

By 1895, the typical pattern of development of areas further south in the city had infiltrated well into the Planning District. Rowhouses, interspersed with churches and other institutions could be found up to Clearfield Street from the eastern side of the district to 17th Street. The far western and northwestern edge of the district remained open, as did the area above Allegheny Avenue east of American Street. The main exception to the latter, however, was the area bounded today by I street on the west, Cayuga Street on the north, M Street on the east and Lycoming Street on the south: the lots of Juniata Park had been laid out for development by the Juniata Park Land Association, although none had yet seen construction. By 1925 (figure 13), lots had been sold, but only one house had been built there.

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Figure 12. Detail, *Philadelphia of To-day*, Burk and McFetridge, 1887.
Third Period of Development: 1900s to the 1980s – Final Buildout, late Growth, and Decline after the 1950s.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw a significant development that would affect the North Planning District just as the coming of the railroad had in the period before the Civil War, and one that would signal the arrival of automobile culture. This was the creation of what was for the period a grand roadway, called only the Northeast Boulevard at first and later renamed in memory of Theodore Roosevelt. This project was allied with other progressive “City Beautiful” projects of the period such as the creation of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Clinton Rogers Woodruffe, writing in Gustav Stickley’s *Craftsman* magazine in 1906, linked the creation of the Boulevard to the rebirth of the city, noting that “few cities in America are making more steady progress toward the realization of ‘more beautiful public life.’”

Woodruffe describes the “Torresdale Boulevard” as being “admirably conceived,” noting the advantages of not having to go through “solid blocks of houses” as in the Parkway’s development, and suggests that the Boulevard ought to inspire a break with the city’s “checkerboard system of construction,” which he characterizes as “not the best.”

The creation of the Boulevard was a significant and large undertaking in the period when automobiles were just beginning to come into use and remained largely the province of the very wealthy. Construction of the thoroughfare, referred to as either the Torresdale or Northeast Boulevard in its first decades, progressed from its starting point at Broad Street immediately above Hunting Park, at a steady pace. By 1910, construction had reached the area of Oxford Circle and therefore already gone beyond the limits of the Planning District.

By the time of the completion of the initial construction of the Boulevard in the Planning District, some areas of the district still remained undeveloped, particularly around Hunting Park east of Broad Street, and the area north of Erie Avenue and east of 2nd Street. In 1910, brick yards could still be found in several locations near Hunting Park. A large, new complex for the Philadelphia Hospital for Contagious Diseases was completed in 1909 in the block bounded by Front and Second streets, Luzerne Street and Hunting Park Avenue in former estate land that was still open at the time. New factories continued to be created in this area into the eve of the Great Depression. At the other end of the Planning District, an important cluster of new factories was created: Reyburn Manufacturing, Nice Ball Bearing, Tasty Baking, Atwater Kent, and the Budd Company all were built in the 1910s and 1920s on land that had belonged to the Dobsons (figures 14-16). During World War II, the federal government took over a significant portion of this area for defense plant use, and the Abbotsford Homes were constructed for associated workers.

In the period after the war, growth continued. The city’s Planning Commission found that between 1944 and 1954, about 50 acres of addition industrial land use had come into the Upper North Planning Analysis Section (figure 17), which corresponds to much of the North Planning District, and which the commission still termed “the industrial center of the City.” The growth in this period had occurred both in the “East Falls-Nicetown” area where the 1910s-1920s cluster had been built, and in the “Erie” industrial district.
Figure 14. Plate 10, G. W. and W. S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, North Philadelphia, Ward 25, 33, 37, 38, 43 & 45*, 1925, showing the extent of the Arwater Kent Company landholdings and construction at this date and the Budd Company (right).

Figure 15. Plate 5, G. W. and W. S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, North Philadelphia, Ward 25, 33, 37, 38, 43 & 45*, 1925, showing the continuation of the Budd Company south of Hunting Park Avenue at this date.

Despite this continued activity, the Planning District did begin to suffer with the decline of the city’s industrial economy at the Depression. The character of the built environment and a snapshot of the ethnicity and economic class status of the residents of the Planning District in the period of the Depression can be derived from the J. M. Brewer’s map of 1934, which located Jews, African-Americans, and those of Italian background in the city for the real estate industry, and from the 1936 and 1937 reports of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation.47

Brewer’s map indicates a mix of ethnicities and race in the district, with several concentrations worth noting. The district was predominantly white, but African-American neighborhoods had been established in the oldest part of Nicetown and nearby on the western side of Germantown Avenue. In fact, Nicetown had been an African-American neighborhood since at least the end of the nineteenth century, when the Nazarene Baptist Church was founded there.48 Italian-Americans were found in concentrations around Indiana Avenue and 21st Street, and at 10th and Ontario streets. A fairly large Jewish neighborhood had developed adjacent to the Roosevelt Boulevard at the far northeast corner of the Planning District.

The Home Owner’s Loan Corporation reports of the late 1930s provide a complementary picture. In 1936, the HOLC aggregated the area of the Planning District with all of North Philadelphia east of Broad Street, extending to the Delaware River and including communities such as Bridesburg and Kensington. The portion of the report that analyzed the Planning District described it as “heavily dotted with light industries” with “the tracks of both the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Reading Railroad . . . lined with miscellaneous plants,” particularly “a large number of the city’s textile and hosiery mills.” The houses were characterized as “practically all of substantial age and of very modest two story brick row type.” The area in general was seen as “definitely declining.” The only area that was rated as “best” was the “extreme north eastern end of the section” beyond the limits of the Planning District in the Lower Northeast. North Philadelphia west of Broad was addressed as a separate report area, but the part of the city north of Cumberland Street, “including Tioga” was also described as “definitely declining.” It was further asserted that “even in its best days the population of this area was chiefly skilled workers, mechanics and white collar workers and it retains this general characteristic today,” which clearly did not comprise the best grade of real estate for the HOLC. If one leaves aside the connotations of the term “declining” as a questionable understanding of impending decay, the HOLC reports can be read as a picture of the Planning District as a portion of the city that had finally reached developmental maturity, and which was dependent on the extensive industrial facilities of varying scales that had been enabled by the juxtaposition of the railroad and former estate open land.

In the period after World War II, the continued growth in industry in the Planning District was a notable exception to what was happening in other sections of the city. Beyond this, significant

47 Brewer’s map is in the collection of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The reports of the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation are available at the University of Pennsylvania’s Cartographic Modeling Laboratory thanks to the research of Amy Hillier, see http://cml.upenn.edu.
physical changes appeared at the upper edge of the district with the construction of the twin bridges and the expressway connecting the Roosevelt Boulevard at Broad Street with the Schuylkill Expressway, and the widening of the Boulevard to a multi-lane, high-speed roadway in the 1960s. Since the 1960s, however, the area of the planning district, like many other areas of the city, experienced significant economic decline and deterioration of its built fabric as the last portions of the city’s industrial base collapsed. Preservation projects in some of the industrial facilities such as the former Atwater Kent plant provide hope for future vitality of this historically important section of Philadelphia.
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Maps and Real Estate Atlases


