HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT FOR RIVER WARDS PLANNING DISTRICT

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Introduction

The history of the River Wards Planning District, which encompasses the historic neighborhoods of Fishtown, Kensington, Richmond, Port Richmond, and Bridesburg (figure 1) represents some of the most important themes in the City of Philadelphia’s past: pre-contact Lenni Lenape occupation, initial European settlement, country estate development, the crucial role of anthracite coal, and the development of heavy iron and steel industry and the residential communities associated with that development. As much as any other area, the planning district embodies the Delaware as the city’s river of work, in contrast to the Schuylkill, which was, and to a great extent remains, the river associated with leisure. Despite its rich and significant history, however, the River Wards Planning District is relatively poorly represented by historic districts, in large part because, until recently, this was a region of the city that attracted relatively little redevelopment, and because much of the built fabric associated with its industrial past has been lost for some time.

The northeastern portion of the planning district, corresponding to the Bridesburg area, was studied in 2008-2009 in the Historic Context Statement For Neighborhood Cluster 1, and is thus excluded from the present study (see figure 1).

Geographical Summary

Geographically, the River Wards Planning District consists of a strip of land along the Delaware River to its southeast. Historically, the dividing line between the Northern Liberties District (created in 1803, corresponding roughly to the Northern Liberties neighborhood today) and the Kensington District (created 1820, corresponding to the Fishtown, Kensington, Richmond, and Port Richmond neighborhoods) in Philadelphia County was the Cohocksink Creek, which flowed into the Delaware River near the intersection of Delaware Avenue and Penn Street just south of the planning district. Part of its course is recognizable in the path of Canal and Allen streets, also just south of the district, which correspond to a part of the now-culverted creek. The Cohocksink was an important locus for development as the source of water power for mills and other industries. Two other creeks also formed important historic geographic boundaries and developmental nodes for the planning district. Gunnar’s Run, the largest historic stream in the district, is also now culverted. Its path corresponds roughly to Aramingo Avenue, and the stream entered the Delaware just north of where Susquehanna Avenue nears the shoreline today. At the northeastern end of the planning district, in the Bridesburg section, the Frankford Creek formed the border between this section of the city and Frankford. The present, relatively straight channel of Frankford Creek that
corresponds to the dividing line between Bridesburg and Port Richmond was created to control flooding between 1947 and 1956. Historically, the area along the river in the planning district northeast of around Allegheny Avenue was a broad tidal meadow (see figure 2). The topography of the planning district is almost flat, rising slightly from the river on the southeast to Kensington Avenue on the northwest.

First Period of Development: Settlement, Country Seat, and Early Industrial Development: ca. 1650-1830

In 1900-1902, when the Aramingo Canal was culverted as Dyott Street, an important topographical boundary in the planning district was subsumed within the streetscape of the city.
Although the canal, created beginning in 1847, was man-made, it was the modification of a naturally occurring waterway, one of the larger creeks that emptied into the river before they were culverted.

This waterway, historically most often called Gunner’s Run, served, as did several others that historically emptied into the Delaware, as a locus of early mill development. The name itself, originally spelled “Gunnar’s,” recalls the settlement of parts of what is now Philadelphia by Swedes and Finns beginning with the establishment of the New Sweden Colony in 1638: the original full name was Gunnar Rambo’s Creek.¹ In addition to serving as a spine for development, this creek, along with the Cohocksink on the south and Frankford Creek on the north, functioned as a semi-permeable boundary along the river front, marking the limits of zones of development that changed as the city grew.

Before the establishment of the Pennsylvania Colony and the city of Philadelphia in 1682, occupation of the area by Dutch and Swedish immigrants was relatively sparse, with a maximum of approximately 1,000 in the middle of the seventeenth century.² Much of the earliest settlement consisted of subsistence farms, but some Swedes owned fairly large tracts in the 1680s. This was the case in the area between Gunner’s Run on the south and Frankford Creek on the north, where, in addition to Gunnar Rambo, owners included members of the Cock family, as can be seen on Thomas Holme’s 1687 Map of the Improved Part of Pennsylvania indicates (figure 2). The influx of English “First Purchasers” changed this situation after the establishment of the Pennsylvania Colony, and William Penn sold large tracts of land along the river north of the city (then bounded by the two rivers and what are now South and Vine streets), as can be seen in the Holme plan.

In addition to these large tracts, documentary evidence testifies not only to European settlement before the establishment of Pennsylvania, but also to the occupation of the area in semi-permanent, seasonal Lenni Lenape settlements. The area known as Shackamaxon, a corruption of a Lenape name, corresponded to one such pre-historic site, and also to a large single tract bounded by the Cohocksink and Gunner’s Run at the southern edge of the planning district. This 1,800-acre property was acquired by William Penn’s associate Thomas Fairman in 1678 from Swedish settler Lasse Cock.³ The house that Fairman built there has long been thought to be the one represented Benjamin West’s 1771 iconic Penn’s Treaty with the Indians, although whether and when a treaty meeting took place under the elm at the riverside has also long been a subject of debate.⁴

⁴ For a summary of the literature see Sugrue, “Peopling and Depeopling”; 4; see also Laura Rigal, “Framing the Fabric: A Luddite Reading of Penn’s Treaty with the Indians,” American Literary History 12, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 557-584; and Ann Uhry Abrams, “Benjamin West’s Documentation of Colonial History: William Penn’s Treaty with the Indians,” Art Bulletin 64, no. 1 (March 1982): 59-75.
Within a decade of the creation of the colony and the designation of the unincorporated Northern Liberties Township, of which the planning district was only a part, one of its earliest manufactories was established in the planning district, and occasioned one of the first roads to be opened in this part of what was then Philadelphia County. In the early 1690s, the “Inhabitants of Schackamaxon” were given notice of a request for a road leading through their lands to mills at the mouth of the Frankford Creek and to the “Glass-house and Meddow.”\textsuperscript{5} Later evidence (see below) suggests that this “glass house,” one of the earliest such facilities to be created in the colonies, was at the mouth of Gunner’s Run.

Not long after the creation of this road, another, equally as important, was established, or at least regularized from existing tracks on private land. In 1701, “country inhabitants” petitioned the governor for a “settled road” connecting across the Cohocksink with branches from Frankford and Germantown, in order to facilitate access into the city. The first branch was to become Frankford

\textsuperscript{5} Quoted in Harrold E. Gillingham, “Pottery, China, and Glass Making in Philadelphia,” \textit{PMHB} 54, no. 2 (April 1930): 121.
Avenue, one of two key historic spines in the district along with the “glass house” road. The petition also noted the existence of a bridge across the Cohocksink by this date.⁶

Despite the early importance of Shackamaxon, like other early Swedish/English settlement areas in what is now the city, it did not mark a concentration of eighteenth-century development. The taxable population of all of the Northern Liberties numbered only 151 people in 1741, less than 10% of the total within the bounds of the original city.⁷ Growth occurred along the river in Northern Liberties Township from the southeast toward the northwest as the century progressed and was concentrated along the river. Throughout the century, development remained focused south of the Cohocksink, along the spines of Front, Second, and Third streets. The degree of development of this area in the eighteenth century is registered by the creation of the Northern Liberties District (partially incorporated) from Northern Liberties Township in 1803 (figure 3).

Figure 3. Detail, Northern Liberties boundaries, 1803, from Daly and Weinberg, Genealogy of Philadelphia County Subdivisions.

In contrast to the denser urban development south of the Cohocksink in the eighteenth century, the area of the planning district saw a different character of construction in that century. The road to the “Glass-house and Meddow” into the district from the growing city settlement to the

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southwest became the spine of settlements made along this road, which led to “Point no Point” (the road lay in approximately the bed of Richmond Street today). This was a marshy meadow area (presumably the “Meddow” noted above; later part of the city’s Bridesburg section) at the end of a peninsula formed by Frankford Creek where it flowed into the Delaware (figure 4), although the name seems also to have been applied to the waterfront area further south toward Philadelphia.

A bridge for this road crossing Gunner’s Run was presumably also built at the end of the seventeenth century. In addition to providing access to the glasshouse, meadow and mills at Frankford Creek, the road to Point-no-Point became the spine of a series of relatively large estates, which served as country seats for a portion of the city’s elite. Although map evidence attests only to the existence of these larger estates, it is most likely that smaller farm holdings had also been established in the planning district by settlers and estate tenants. In contrast, the road from the Cohocksink to Frankford was not the locus of estate creation in the period before the Revolution.

Figure 4: Detail, Nicholas Scull and George Heap, A Map of Philadelphia and Parts Adjacent, published in the Gentleman’s Magazine, 1753.

Scull and Heap’s 1750s map (figure 4) indicates that a number of estates had been established along the Point-no-Point road by the mid-eighteenth century, as well as the use of the name “Richmond” for part of the area. Rather than reflecting a connection to the Virginia colony, the choice of this name for the region echoes the locus of villas and country estates along the Thames upriver of London. The Scull and Heap map indicates that most of those in Philadelphia County were clustered at the northeastern end of the planning district, but a single large estate had been created along the Point-no-Point road below where Allegheny Avenue lies today before the middle of the eighteenth century. The name “Ball” marks the location of the property owned by William Ball, also known as Richmond Hall. James Duffin’s research into landowners and

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8 See Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia, vol. 3, p. 2150, for the assertion that this bridge was established “early on.”
9 Country seats of the elite lined the Delaware waterfront up into Bucks County.
landholdings in Philadelphia in 1777 indicates that lots had been laid out on either side of the Point-no-Point Road, and that by that date, William Ball (1729-1810) owned close to 400 acres straddling the road from Gunner’s Run northward.10

Duffin’s research also reveals other large landholdings in the inland portion of the planning district along the Frankford Road. The vast estate of Fairhill, belonging to the Norris family, stretched from the central portion of the Northern Liberty lands across the Frankford Road to Gunner’s Run. The southern line of this estate in the planning district was, not coincidentally, Norris Street; it ended just southwest of Lehigh Avenue on the northeast. Adjacent to this portion of the Fairhill estate on the river side of the Frankford Road were other large properties held by Philadelphia merchants. The Scull and Heap map suggest that among these, only Abel James occupied a country residence in the planning district. This estate, Chalkey Hall, was originally established by James’s father-in-law (see Cluster 1 Historic Context Statement) On the inland side of the Frankford Road, there were no comparable large estates in what is now the River Wards.

The fate of William Ball’s property was particularly significant for the future of the planning district. Ball earned a sufficient living as a merchant to have retired from business by the 1780s, when he is listed as a gentleman in Philadelphia city directories.11 On the eve of the Revolution, through the efforts of Benjamin Franklin, changes to the William Ball estate marked the transition of the area from one of country seat estates and small farms into an industrial zone as the glass house was joined by another manufactory.

Sometime before 1774, Franklin had been “engaged in surveys relative to the changing of the Point-no-Point Road” on the Ball estate. In roughly the same period, Franklin had been in touch with English cotton spinner and cotton (calico) printer, John Hewson, whom he had met in London, and who expressed sympathies for the “Republican” cause of the colonies to Franklin. Franklin persuaded Hewson to emigrate, arranging for a lease for part of the Ball estate through his acquaintance with William Ball.12 After his emigration in 1774, Hewson founded what is reported as the first textile print-works in the American colonies on Gunner’s Run near its mouth, and was advertising his wares for sale in Philadelphia newspapers by 1777.13 Hewson went on to distinguish himself as an officer in the Continental Army, and was one of the executors of William Ball’s estate upon his death in 1810.14 A small village known as Balltown developed around the glass works and Hewson’s factory on the northeast side of Gunner’s Run, and in effect became an extension of the growing settlement in what was called Kensington on the southwest side of Gunner’s Run.

13 See, for example, an advertisement that appeared in the Pennsylvania Evening Post, 3 July 1777, for “printed linens.”
Early in 1777, the glass house, then known as the Philadelphia Glass Works, was put up for sale, with Hewson serving as the contact for inquiries for sale. The property was described in detail in advertisements, noting that the lot was “one hundred and fifty feet in breadth on Bank-street (Point-no-Point road), and extends from thence in depth to low-water mark near two hundred feet, with the privilege of a narrow street along the water side, which, if ever requisite, will increase its value.” The buildings on the lot were the brick “glass-house” itself (38' by 42'), which held an “air furnace, annealing oven, &c.”; a brick, 24' x 12' “shrow house and mixing room”; a frame store house, 16' x 24'; and a “commodious frame” residence, 26' x 27', with three rooms on each of two levels. A grinding mill, smith's shop, a well, and a baking oven were also part of the property.15 Interestingly, and foreshadowing later developments along the river, the advertisement also suggested that other uses might be made of the property. Specifically, it was noted that its facilities “may be also well adapted for a foundery [sic], a ship carpenter, for the erecting of wharves, stores, &c. or the carrying on of any extensive manufacture.”

The Scull and Heap Map (figure 4) indicates that before the Revolution, another distinct area of the city was developing in what had been the Thomas Fairman estate south of Gunner's Run. This map shows a small village clustered along the Point-no-Point road in an area labeled as “Kensington.” As for the Richmond section of the river, the name for this portion of Philadelphia County derived from the genteel aspirations of an early estate owner: it is to Anthony Palmer, who acquired part of the Fairman estate in 1730, that the association with the fashionable section of London is due, as well as a series of street names in the area that persisted into the nineteenth century, including King, Queen, Prince, Duke, Bishop, and Crown.16

The Nicole map of 1777 (figure 5) provides further evidence of the pattern of Kensington development, showing the key routes to Germantown, Frankford, and Point-no-Point, as well as the linear development along the Point-no-Point road. The Nicole map also clearly indicates a number of wharves had been constructed along the river by the time of the Revolution. The 1797 Hills map (figure 6) shows further development in this area, including rope walks inland along Queen Street associated with the growing shipyard business on the Kensington waterfront. By the end of the eighteenth century, Kensington had become a crucial center of shipbuilding, as William Birch indicates in his well-known frontispiece to his City of Philadelphia in 1800 (figure 7), which depicts a shipyard in operation at the foot of the Treaty Elm. This part of the planning district also early on acquired the nickname of “Fishtown,” owing to the fact that many of its residents engaged in earning money (if not a living) through fishing, particularly during the spring shad runs on the river. Various nineteenth-century documents indicate that this name for the area was associated with the subsistence livelihood this represented and thus with the poverty of the residents, while “Kensington” was considered the “real” name, and invariably used with respect to early industrial activities there.

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15 “To be SOLD,” Pennsylvania Evening Post, 15 April 1777. Scharf and Westcott indicate that, in the History of Philadelphia 3: 2298, the buildings of the glass works were constructed about 1771 by Robert Towars and Joseph Leacock, although the basis of this assertion is not known.
Figure 5. Detail, P. Nicole, *A Survey of the City of Philadelphia and its Environs*, 1777.

Figure 6. Detail, John Hills *Plan of the City of Philadelphia and Environs*, 1796, showing development of Northern Liberties and Kensington.
Further evidence of eighteenth-century development below Gunner’s Run is provided by tax records from the 1780s. These reveal a well-established, urban mercantile and small-scale manufacturing existence in the eastern portion Northern Liberties in the period after the Revolution, although it is not possible to be certain about the location of those listed, and most merchants were presumably located south of the planning district and closer to the mercantile center along the river in the original city.\textsuperscript{17} Farmers were relatively rare in the eastern portion of the Northern Liberties in the period just after the Revolution, although maps from the 1790s indicate that farming was conducted west of Fifth Street, well away from the waterfront. Among the manufacturers, tanners

\textsuperscript{17} William Henry Egle, ed., \textit{Supply, and State Tax Lists of the City and County of Philadelphia for the Years 1781, 1782 and 1783} (Harrisburg: William Stanley Ray, 1898), 68-81.
were the most successful; they amassed estates equaling many individuals listed as “gentlemen,” despite the fact that they conducted their noxious business clustered along waterways, particularly the Cohocksink, in order to keep the offensive odors inherent in their work away from city settlement. Tanneries remained the most numerous industries along the Cohocksink into the eve of the Civil War, and at least one tannery survived there into the 1870s.18 John Hills's map of 1796 (figure 6) clearly indicates the newly created Cohocksink Canal, which remained a key locus of water-powered industry in the District well into the early decades of the nineteenth century.19

Figure 8. John Hills, *Plan of the City of Philadelphia and Environs*, 1808, detail, showing the location of “Balltown” and “Kensington” in the early nineteenth century.

John Hills’ map of 1808 of the Philadelphia region (figure 8) indicates the development of streets in “Balltown” in Richmond and the growth of Kensington to that point: houses could be found on many of the streets Palmer laid out in the former Fairman estate. The most fully developed, in addition to the Point-no-Point road, was Palmer Street at this point, followed by Shackamaxon Street. The roads of the early grid also included Hanover (later changed to East

19 The Creek was declared a “public highway” in 1797.
Oxford) and Marlboro (later Crease) streets. The character of development at that date was described at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, as the stage was set for Philadelphia to begin to shift from a mercantile to a manufacturing economy, the southern part of the planning district began to grow steadily as the city expanded to fill its original boundaries and beyond along the Delaware River waterfront. In that first decade of the century, the Cohocksink became a crucial locus of Philadelphia’s early industry when Seth Craige established the “first large cotton mill in the state” along the creek, which by 1816 “was the largest manufactory of its kind in the country.”

Textile production would become the most dominant sector in southernmost part of the planning district through to the Great Depression. An equally important event in the history of the city’s industrial metal production took place in Kensington just above the Cohocksink with by C. B. Parke’s establishment in 1819 of the Point Pleasant Foundry, located between Beach Street and Delaware Avenue at Poplar. The foundry cast both brass and iron, producing bells and fittings for ships, thus serving the shipyards in the vicinity. In addition, Parke made “sugar mills, soap-boilers’ pans, forge and tilt hammers, anvils, rollers, and castings of every description.”

The character of Kensington in the early nineteenth century was captured through some key statistics by James Mease in his *Picture of Philadelphia* of 1811 and by the history of the Kensington Methodist Church, the first congregation established in the planning district. Mease reported that while the Northern Liberties District area had more than doubled in population between 1790 to 1810, going from slightly more than 8,000 to over 20,000 residents with a total of about 4,300 buildings at the end of that period, of which 91 were manufacturing buildings but just over 1,000 were secondary buildings that included workshops as well as stables. In contrast, in 1810 Kensington boasted only some 870 buildings, of which 615 were houses (the majority of these were built of wood frame). Kensington also had 4 public buildings, 10 manufacturing buildings, and over 200 secondary buildings that included stables and workshops. Mease characterized about 5% of all the buildings in Kensington as “new.”

Mease also noted in one of his recommended “tours of the vicinity,” that visitors to Kensington would find a “pleasing spectacle which is exhibited, of ship building, in all the various stages,” as well as the stump of the purported Treaty Elm (shown in Birch’s view), which had “blown down March 3, 1810.”

Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Reverend Swindells, pastor of the Kensington Methodist Church, founded in 1801 as a splinter from St. George’s in Old City under the leadership of fabric manufacturer John Hewson (see above), provides additional detail on the early development of the area. Swindells related that “there was not a connected row of houses or block

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of buildings in the district; in a few places two or three buildings were joined together,” that “people generally owned the houses they lived in, which had garden plots attached to them,” that the “dwellings were mainly two and a half stories.”

Mease also gives us a clear sense of the area of the planning district further upriver at the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century. In his discussion of the scenery to be found near Kensington, he recommends that after a visit to the site of the Treaty Tree, that tourists “go to what is called the Point no Point road.” First, they will pass the “glass house” on the river side of the road, and then encounter “extensive market gardens” for the growing city. Following this, they will see “several handsome summer retreats”—the country houses owned by Philadelphia merchants—and beyond these the traveler “cannot fail to be interested by beholding a range of meadow, three miles long, banked in from the Delaware, on which herds of cattle are seen grazing.” An inn served as the destination for tourists at the end of the Point no Point road. Mease recommends crossing the Frankford Creek to Frankford village, and then returning by way of the “turnpike” (Frankford Road).

In 1820, Kensington District was established in Northern Liberties Township, stretching from the Cohocksink on the south to Norris Street on the north, and bounded by 6th Street on the west, and indicating the degree of growth in the area. In 1824, when Thomas Wilson published an update of Mease’s 1811 Picture, the rate of the city’s industrial growth was made clear by his account of facilities in Kensington, and in the number of residents of the new district, which totaled over 7,000, and which Reverend Swindells characterized as “chiefly of English of German descent.” Northern Liberties District was the only more populous area in Philadelphia County in 1820.25 The Arkwright and Steam-Mill, on Front Street, employing “sixty hands,” and the Kensington Cotton Mill, “on the margin of the Delaware,” with 163 men, women and children working there, were recorded by Wilson as one of the “principal Factories of note in and near the City.”26 The Kensington Steam Engine Manufactory, which, although it only employed 15, is nonetheless notable for its early date. Wilson reported that Kensington could also boast a market place (located at the foot of the Frankford Road), even if “during the week” it was “but illly attended.”27 Kensington’s first bank, adjacent to the market place, was incorporated in 1826 under President John C. Browne.28

24 William Swindells, Annals of the Kensington Methodist Church (Philadelphia, 1893), p. 8
26 Wilson, Picture of Philadelphia for 1824, p. 10.
27 Wilson, Picture of Philadelphia for 1824, p. 69.
Second Period of Development: The Arrival of Coal and the First Phase of Industrial Development: 1820s through the Eve of the Civil War

The period from the 1820s to the Civil War saw substantial changes throughout Philadelphia. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Philadelphia grew at what seemed an exponential rate, particularly in the 1830s and '40s. Immigrants formed a substantial percentage of the expansion in population. By mid-century, nearly one-quarter of the half-million citizens in Philadelphia’s city and county had been born in other countries. Many of these were Irish Catholics, significantly changing the religious demographic in the city, which had been predominantly Protestant (although, despite the city’s reputation, Quakers had ceased to be the majority early in its history). Although still a definite minority, Philadelphia’s free African-American community also grew significantly. In the eighteenth century, the city was relatively little segregated by class and race; in the early years of the nineteenth century, clusters of groups allied by ethnic background, social class, and religious affiliation began to form.

Between 1820 and 1830, the population of Kensington nearly doubled, reaching, according to the federal census, a total of 13,328 at the end of that decade. In contrast to the original city, Southwark, and Northern Liberties combined, which had nearly 9.5% African-American population in 1830, blacks numbered only around 1.5 percent of Kensington’s residents that year, with only 10 black-headed households. A total of 5 households were headed by whites but had African-Americans in them in the district. The small number of African-Americans in these households suggests that they were servants, although this category of information was not collected by the federal census in this period.

The rate of growth in the 1830s and 1840s in Kensington is registered by the subdivision of the district, in 1834, into five wards (the 1st, 4th and part of the 5th lie in the territory that are now within the planning district) and then into seven in 1846. The Kensington waterfront was the locus of increasing industrial beginnings in the same decades, and the 1840 federal census records that most heads of households in Kensington were employed in manufacturing, much of which was presumably in small-scale manufactories and shipbuilding. In 1826, Francis Harley established a foundry near the Point Pleasant works. Like the Point Pleasant facility, Harley’s “Kensington, Iron, Brass, and Bell Foundry,” produced bells and castings for ships and “sugar pans, sugar mills, soapboilers’ pans, forge and tilt hammers, and anvils,” but also made “castings for grist and saw mills, steam engines, cotton and woolen manufactories &c.,” thus providing key products for development of Philadelphia industry more generally. It is notable that in Thomas Porter’s 1831 update of Mease’s Picture of Philadelphia, only three foundries in the city were noted: Parke’s Point Pleasant Works, Harley’s operation (both in Kensington), and one other (the only other was Merrick and Agnew’s fire engine works between 9th and 10th on Vine Street).

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30 Mease and Porter, Picture of Philadelphia vol. 2, p. 76.
In 1830, William Cramp, a 23-year-old “Fishtown” native, established his first shipyard on the river at the end of E. Susquehanna Avenue, followed soon after by one at the foot of Palmer Street, which would continue to operate as a Cramp company dry dock and repair shop after the move of the main operations to Port Richmond. Clement & Dunbar established a facility in 1837 on the river at Beach and Shackamaxon streets manufacturing cedar wood objects, including butter churns, undoubtedly as an outgrowth of ship construction, since cedar is a prized marine construction material (and was harvested relatively nearby in quantity, in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, for example). Clement & Dunbar continued in business until at least the 1870s.32 In the mid-1830s, John Vaughan & Son’s new steamer Pennsylvania, built at Kensington, cut through the ice on the frozen Delaware for the first time, solving a recurring seasonal problem that often stopped shipping traffic to the city’s port for months in the winter. Metal production moved north to meet shipbuilding with the establishment of Neafie & Levy’s Penn Steam Engine & Boiler Works in 1844 at the corner of Palmer and Beach streets, joining the foundries located nearby. The firm continued to thrive into the end of the century, producing a key innovation in the design of the screw propeller, which would displace steam-driven paddle wheel steering.33

The 1830s also saw a crucial development in another part of the district of a different character: the establishment of the Philadelphia and Trenton Railroad’s main depot in Kensington between Front Street and Frankford Avenue just north of Palmer Street. In November, 1834 the first train ran from Morrisville, Pennsylvania to Kensington.34

As the shift from water to steam power became the predominant force in Philadelphia industry, coupled with the introduction of railroads, the area became one in which several of the most important Philadelphia of manufactories were established, and one in which Philadelphia’s factory workers (increasingly immigrants) also found residence as the dense urban fabric of the city continued to grow north and westward. The shift in power source also changed the physical landscape of the city that already existed. For example, inland portions of the Cohocksink Creek, channelized by the late eighteenth century, were culverted and covered over to become Canal Street (and a sewer) by the middle of the nineteenth (the canal below E. Laurel Street remained open into the 1870s). The street’s serpentine path is a reminder to the present of this important aspect of the city’s early topography, settlement, and industrial development. Nonetheless, the area around the mouth of the Cohocksink remained a place where casting facilities were concentrated. The effect on the Philadelphia landscape of this new level of industrial production can be seen in J. Bachman’s 1857 Bird’s Eye View of Philadelphia (figure 9).

Since industrial facilities were no longer limited by geography after the shift to steam from water power and the spread of rail transportation within the city, the concentration around the Cohocksink creek and later canal gave way to dispersal of these larger buildings within the neighborhood landscape. Often these facilities grew into, and slowly absorbed, their immediate residential surroundings.

The rapid growth of the city in general was amply manifested in Kensington, in large measure because of the industries that were established there in the decades before the Civil War as steam power and locomotive transportation for goods became available. With the influx of immigrants from Ireland and Germany and the growth of the city’s free black community as the middle of the century neared, ethnic enclaves began to be established in both Northern Liberties and Kensington. Race riots erupted in part because of the competition for work between free African-Americans and new immigrants, and conflict also developed between workers born in the United States and those arriving in the city, particularly from Ireland. In 1844, Kensington was the location for a violent clash between Irish Catholics and American-born Protestant textile workers over social, religious, and political issues, and St. Michael’s Catholic Church was destroyed. The cornerstone for Port Richmond’s first Catholic Church, St. Ann’s, was laid the following year, primarily to serve those who had begun to find work in Richmond.

The increased population of the area led to the creation of the Spring Garden and Northern Liberties Waterworks in 1844, formerly located on the Schuylkill River outside of the study area, and the establishment of a gasworks in Northern Liberties along the Cohocksink on the south side of E. Laurel Street in the same period. Demand spurred by continued growth led to the creation of a Kensington Water Works in 1850, but it drew “from a stretch of the river that by the mid-1860s received over thirteen million gallons of sewage daily.”

Kensington’s industrial growth in the years before the Civil War crossed several production sectors, reflecting continuity with earlier practices (such as the concentration of tanning and leather working in the area) and new developments. Throughout Kensington, as in Old City, small manufactories could be found woven into the residential fabric in buildings no wider than rowhouses. Examples of this type can still be found in the portion of the Fishtown neighborhood, along with residences that date from the late eighteenth century, and the first church congregation to be established in Kensington, the Kensington Methodist Church, whose mid-nineteenth century building testifies to the growth of the area in the period between 1820 and the Civil War.

While the area south of Gunner’s Run developed rapidly in the period before 1830, the relatively remote location of the area north of this waterway along the Delaware River meant that the marshy meadow at the upper end of the district planning remained as such until the eve of the Civil War. Nonetheless, events associated with the glass works at the mouth of Gunner’s Run are significant. The facility changed hands several times in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and notably, a second glass factory was established inland on Gunner’s Run: Union Flint Glass Works, which produced fine cut glass for the city, was established in 1825.

A turning point was reached when, in 1831, the first glassworks were sold to “Dr.” Thomas W. Dyott, who had worked his way successfully up from immigrant with little money to manufacturer of shoeblack and then extremely successful vendor of patent medicine, for which he used the bottles from the glassworks. After acquiring the manufactory, Dyott established an ambitious “model community,” which was to combine “mental and moral with manual labor.” Dyott’s total holdings numbered 400 acres along the river, which supplied farm products for the over 200 apprentices; Dyott’s scheme, which included a chapel on the premises and lodging for


38 This is shown in Samuel L. Smedley, Atlas of the City of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1862), Section 13, which indicates “Meadow Land,” and “Marsh” along the river below Allegheny Avenue, and in period lithographs and watercolor views. See Wainwright, “The Age of Nicholas Biddle,” p. 279, and D. J. Kenney watercolor of Dyott’s glassworks, collection Historical Society of Pennsylvania, http://www.philaplace.org/media/4160/.


married workers and families, regulated the schedule and activity of the laborers and apprentices according to a strict regimen.41

Dyott overextended himself and was prosecuted for “fraudulent insolvency,” and was convicted in 1839 to a three-year sentence. Significantly, while Dyott was imprisoned, Josiah White’s Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company (a rival to the original Schuylkill Navigation that was established to bring coal down Philadelphia’s “other” river from the Reading area) took possession of the riverfront of Dyott’s land, using it for a coal depot.42 The “first coal of consequence” to arrive in Philadelphia “had been 365 tons brought down the Delaware from the Lehigh area [by Josiah White] in 1820.”43 By the 1840s, the Dyottville works were back in operation; they continued to function until after the Civil War.44

Following on the heels of the Lehigh Navigation’s coal depot, one of the most significant events to shape the history not only the planning 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 river.45 This coal depot was opened after the Reading Railroad completed the five mile connector from the Schuylkill at East Falls in 1842.46 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. Philadelphia was among the most important coal supply points in the nation.

In the same period in which the Coal Depot was created, industry and residential development made its way increasingly into the area north of Gunner’s Run and inland in the planning district above Kensington. Charles Ellet’s 1843 Map of the County of Philadelphia from Actual Survey shows a series of wharfs above the Coal Depot, as well as a several block Richmond village development extending from approximately one block northwest of Richmond Street (Salmon Street) to the river, and from Ann Street on the northeast (then Richmond Lane) to E. Cambria Street.47 On the northwest side of Salmon Street lay a chemical works. Inland in the planning district, northwest of the growing Richmond village, and further northeast along the Point-no-Point road, development remained both relatively sparse and concentrated along the major arteries of this

43 Wainwright, “The Age of Nicholas Biddle,” p. 268.
road and the Frankford Road, with two exceptions. Along the Frankford Road near the Frankford Creek and the village of Frankford itself, a more concentrated cluster called Roseville had developed, and both a dye works and steam engine factory were located nearby. Around what is now the intersection of Frankford Avenue and Somerset Street, another small village had developed, called Heartsville.

To the south of the Richmond village lay McQuaid’s Steam Boiler Factory at roughly the end of E. Huntington Street, the first heavy industrial facility to be established north of Gunner’s Run in the planning district outside of the orbit of Frankford village. Not surprisingly, one result of the shift from water to steam power, and the smelting advances made possible by anthracite in Philadelphia was the development of an extensive manufacture in the city of steam engines and boilers. By 1838, “there were more steam engines in Pennsylvania than any other state, with nearly all of those in Philadelphia of local manufacture.”

The further industrial use of Gunner’s Run was guaranteed when, in 1847, initially in order to create a “grand depot for trade” in the form of a shipping basin with docks, it began to be channeled as the Aramingo Canal, a process that would continued into the 1860s. In 1845, a particularly important iron works moved to a site adjacent to the Reading Depot: the Isaac P. Morris, Towne & Co. foundry, later known as the Port Richmond Iron Works, relocated to the riverfront just to the south of the depot, initially limited by Beach Street on the northwest. By 1850, steel production in Philadelphia was conducted virtually exclusively in Kensington. In 1868, the Port Richmond Ironworks was described as “one of the establishments to which Philadelphia is indebted for her reputation for [the] ability to construct heavy machinery,” and had expanded its facilities substantially to Richmond Street.

In the first years of operation, the Depot was a relatively small area on the water’s edge at the end of the tracks that ran along the right-of-way still extant between Somerset Street and East Lehigh Avenue. By the mid-1850s, the Coal Depot already dominated significant territory along the Delaware (figure 10). Its tracks fanned out like a river delta to wharves stretching from E. Cambria Street to just below E. Huntington Street; a large engine house lay at the center of the delta at the end of the original rail line. Below the Coal Depot and above Gunner’s Run, Richmond village was growing rapidly in the pre-Civil War period. In addition to the Coal Depot, a significant factory was established in the 1840s along Gunner’s Run: the John T. Lewis & Brothers Company white lead

factory was relocated from further south in the city in 1848.\textsuperscript{52} This company and its successors remained in the paint production business in the triangular lot bounded by E. Thompson and E. Huntingdon streets and Aramingo Avenue into the 1960s.

The extent of development of what had become known as Port Richmond thanks to the presence of the Coal Depot and increasing industry in the period before the Civil War can be seen in J. Bachman’s aerial lithographic view of 1857 (see figure 9). Port Richmond had become part of the dense city fabric as it stretched out into the former Philadelphia County after the consolidation of the city in 1854.

The Delaware’s wharves and the Reading Railroad’s massive coal depot at Port Richmond facilitated the growth of heavy industry in the planning district. Notable among the factories in the area was Henry Disston’s first manufacturing facility: his Keystone Saw began as a relatively small plant near the Cohocksink Canal in 1840, originally using water power and later steam, and eventually expanded to over seven acres before Disston moved his operation to the Tacony area of the city after the Civil War, where it became one of the dominant industrial sites of the region.\textsuperscript{53}

At the time of the Consolidation of the city and county, the continued growth in the planning district to the north of what had been the Kensington District meant the zone north of Norris Street came to be understood as Kensington. In 1855, the year after the Consolidation, the 25\textsuperscript{th} Ward was created in the planning district in the area upriver from Lehigh Avenue and from the Delaware to Frankford Avenue on the northwest, indicating the rapid rate of development beyond the Coal Depot.

By the time of the Civil War, new development in the River Wards was concentrated in two areas. The first of these was in the northern extension of the former Kensington District in part of the area known as the Kensington neighborhood today. This Kensington extension was particularly concentrated east of Front Street and just north of Frankford Avenue. The establishment of the “Kensington and Frankford plank road” in 1853 (Kensington Avenue today) spurred further development north of the Kensington railroad depot at Front Street above Palmer Street, provided one of the first horse car lines in the planning district, and furthered the connection of the western end of the planning district with both Frankford and areas of the city further south. Horse car lines also ran along East Girard Avenue, the largest boulevard in the planning area in the 1850s, and Richmond Street as far as the Coal Depot, whose wharves stretched from Huntington Street to Cambria Street. In this north Kensington area, factories were concentrated south of the railway line (Trenton Avenue) between Huntington and Norris streets, as well as along the Aramingo Canal between Norris Street and Lehigh Avenue.


\textsuperscript{53} See Hexamer 1873 survey, \url{http://www.philageohistory.org/rdic-images/view-image.cfm/HGSv8.0693-694}. 
This area of growing concentration was dependent on industry, just as the waterfront areas had been. In contrast to the dominance of iron and steel production closer to the river, this north Kensington zone would become dominated by textile production, particularly carpets, and become, along with Manayunk, the area of the most important for this sector. Among the first, and most important carpet works was established by John T. Bromley in 1845 in a triangular lot bounded by Front, Jasper, and York streets. Philadelphia had been the country’s leading producer of carpet since the early nineteenth century, and was termed the “great carpet-making centre of America” in 1883 with Bromley as one of the leading producers along with the firms started with and later by his sons. The Bromley works would remain the largest carpet producer in northern Kensington and be joined by many other textile producers in this area, all served by rail transportation to move their goods.

The second area of concentration lay northeast of the Coal Depot lines in the growing Port Richmond village, whose patchy outskirts had reached as far inland as Belgrade Street and as far upriver as Allegheny Avenue, which had been laid out by 1862 and was poised to become an important spine by the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the inland portion of the district north of the growing Kensington area, the Frankford Road remained the primary spine of development, and construction was relatively scattered and rural in character in contrast to the density of row house development in Kensington and Richmond. While several factories could be found at the northern corner of the planning district adjacent to Frankford Creek, one large factory was located in an otherwise isolated area adjacent to the Philadelphia and Trenton Railroad by 1862. The Aramingo Chemical Works, which specialized in the manufacture of acids, stood alone at what would later be the corner of Castor Avenue and Amber Street. After the Civil War, dye and chemical works would become an important sector of the growing industrial production in the River Wards.

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Third Period of Development: Second Phase of Industrial and Residential Development: 1870s to the Depression

One of the largest of these to be built in the aftermath of the Civil War was the Riverside Glue Works, begun in 1866 and the first large-scale industrial plant to be constructed north of the Coal Depot in the planning district. Like the tanneries that had been established on the Cohocksink in previous generations, Riverside Glue was located at the farthest limits of the city's development.
because of the noxious nature of its industrial, animal-based processes. The difference in size between the early tanneries and Riverside Glue, however, exemplified the shift in scale in pre-and post-Civil War industry: Riverside took up several city blocks, spanning the area from Allegheny Avenue to Westmoreland Street between Richmond Street and the river. By the 1880s, the facility had over 30 buildings. By 1880, the Second and Third Street Passenger Railway’s Bridesburg Branch horsecar line company had built a stable adjacent to the glue factory, where presumably any animals too old for service could be sent next door for “recycling.” The area around Riverside Glue would become one of concentration of rendering operations in the period after the Civil War.

Between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century, industry continued to expand significantly both in scale and number of factories in the planning district, moving toward increasingly larger facilities and into Port Richmond and inland areas of the planning district in what was now known as Kensington. Residential development followed. By 1875, very little undeveloped land remained in the planning district below Lehigh Avenue. The Delaware River remained an important point of focus of industrial production, since access to the water and riverfront wharves facilitated the movement of heavy goods. In addition to plants producing iron and steel located on the Kensington/Fishtown waterfront, a significant number of lumber yards could be found near the river below Port Richmond, as well as several sugar refineries. The tanneries along the Cohocksink dwindled in number.

Between the period shortly after the Civil War and the Great Depression, Richmond saw continued expansion of industry, and the concentration of activity in two sites. A key event came in 1872 with the relocation of William Cramp’s Shipyard from Kensington. The motivation for this move was the fact that “no engine-building plant was attached to the old shipyard; hence the steamships it built were powered by contract with independent engine builders. This system worked well enough so long as marine machinery was of secondary importance.” However, “the rapid development of steam shipping immediately after the Civil War rendered a combination of the two industries indispensable to the best success.” The Cramp shipyard thus formed an association with the I. P. Morris foundry, eventually fully absorbing it as a division in 1891. This association was aided by two factors: first was the apprenticeship, beginning in 1870, of Henry W. Cramp, William Cramp’s oldest son, with I. P. Morris & Co., and the death, the year before, of I. P. Morris himself.

The Cramp company initially built exclusively in wood, as was conventional at the time, but ensured its success by making the transition in the nineteenth century to the incorporation of steam engines in its vessels, as the preceding passage indicates, and then to metal ship manufacture. In

60 William Cramp & Sons Ship and Engine Building Company, Cramp’s Shipyard, 10.
fact, Cramp became one of the world’s largest manufacturers of iron ships, producing not only naval vessels, but also passenger liners, luxury yachts, and Coney Island excursion boats. The association with and later acquisition of I. P. Morris was instrumental in making this change, and this successful transition eventually separated them from the vast majority of shipbuilders on the northern Delaware riverfront, leaving them as the only ones in operation by the Great Depression. Only the Baldwin Locomotive company rivaled the national reach and reputation of the Cramp company as a manufacturing concern between the 1876 Centennial and World War I.61

As Cramp transitioned from wood to iron and steel, the size and extent of the Cramp company facilities grew, and a number of lumber yards and saw mills also rose up along and near the Aramingo Canal to serve Cramp and other shipbuilders further south. In 1875, two large lumber mills – Brown & Woelpper’s and Gillingham & Garrison’s – were located on the canal inland of the Dyottville works.62 That same year, the Cramp’s company property was concentrated on the water side of Beach Street below I. P. Morris at York Street, and continuing south to Plum Street, and consisted of a mixture of frame and brick buildings and structures.63

In 1891, when I. P. Morris was absorbed by the Cramp company, the physical plant had been substantially improved by the construction of brick buildings virtually throughout.64 The Shipyard continued to grow steadily into the period of World War I, engulfing most of the residential development that had stood on streets between Richmond Street and the water. One of the last structures to be built for the company was the I. P. Morris & Co. Machine Shop #2, the only building of the complex left standing, until recently, at 2225 Richmond Street. In 1927, after the company had been sold by William Cramp’s surviving successors, it was closed, although it was re-opened for wartime production for World War II.

Like the Cramp Company, the Reading Coal depot continued to grow during the latter part of the nineteenth century, constructing ever more tracks, service and storage facilities and structures, and wharves. From 1887 on, the Depot handled both coal and freight exporting, and became a crucial freight shipping point for the city.65 The important role of coal as an energy source well into the twentieth century assured the importance of this facility to the residential neighborhoods around it and to the city.

By the late 1880s, this expansion of service led to growth upriver from the Depot’s former limits at E. Cambria Street. The Depot eroded the edge of the relatively sparse residential development on the river side of Richmond Street, reaching E. Allegheny Avenue by 1895 with large

storage facilities. By 1910, a sea of tracks (see figure 12) had taken over this area, leaving a few blocks along Melvale Street (now mostly under the right-of-way of I-95) in houses.66


At the height of its operations, the Port Richmond yards and docks were the largest privately-owned tidewater terminal in the world, spread over a total of 230 acres, with a capacity of 5,600 cars at 44 feet each in length. A shed containing five tracks, each capable of handling eight cars, was constructed for wintertime loading; it contained steam coils to thaw frozen loads of coal so that it could be dumped into ships. At the river's edge were four loading ramps for rail cars, which could be transported by floats over the Delaware, five at a time, to New Jersey. In addition to storage tanks for coal, the yards included storage facilities for grain, raw sugar, and other bulk materials.

Beyond the Coal Depot and the Cramp yards, development in the planning district continued to proceed steadily in the late nineteenth century. In 1877, the city built a large gasworks plant along the riverfront at the end of Venango Street in what was then an open area. By 1887, the portion of the planning district downriver from Lehigh Avenue had been completed built out in a fabric of railroad lines, factories, the city’s street grid, rowhouse residences, and the schools and churches that served the residential population (figure 13). In contrast to development in other parts of the city, the area was notably lacking in institutions.

Figure 13: Detail, Burk and McFetridge, *Philadelphia of To-Day*, 1887. This image shows the extent of development in Port Richmond and inland between the Pennsylvania Railroad and Kensington Avenue at this date.

Upriver of Lehigh Avenue, development remained sparser, and was concentrated in specific zones. Relatively large open areas could be found in this portion of the planning district well into the early twentieth century. The first area of concentration was Port Richmond, which remained on the river side of the Aramingo Canal and did not extend far beyond Allegheny Avenue toward Bridesburg before 1895. Beyond the factories on the upriver edge of Port Richmond, country houses could still be found on the former Point no Point Road between those factories and Bridesburg itself. The second area of concentration was the inland development concentrated between the Pennsylvania Railroad line to Trenton (the former Philadelphia and Trenton Railroad, on Trenton Avenue) and Kensington Avenue. Real estate atlases of the 1880s and 1890s reveal that this area consisted of rowhouse group developments, houses that had been built at different times but abutting each other (principally on Frankford Avenue), and smaller factories than those that

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could be found downriver of the Reading Railroad Depot tracks in Kensington. By 1895, development in this strip of land bounded by the rail line and Kensington Avenue had begun to connect with construction moving southwest from the outskirts of Frankford, although there were still a significant number of empty lots in this zone. The vast majority of this late nineteenth century construction was in rowhouse groups, intermixed with relatively small factories and occasional freestanding houses, some masonry and some frame, that predated the industry-associated residential construction.

The first decades of the twentieth century brought important changes as well continuation of growth along the same patterns as those established in the late nineteenth century. In about 1900-1902, the Aramingo Canal, which no longer served an industrial purpose and, functioning essentially as an open sewer had become perceived as a nuisance, was culverted. This final death knell for water-power industry in the planning district was followed, not long after, by an equally important infrastructure change. In 1915, the replacement of surface trolleys on Kensington Avenue with the elevated line connecting Frankford through to Center City and West Philadelphia was completed. This key transportation route both served and reinforced the continuation of the development in the band between the Pennsylvania Rail line and Kensington Avenue.

By 1927, this zone had essentially been built out (figures 14 and 15), with Allegheny Avenue serving as a key spine perpendicular to Kensington Avenue. Port Richmond reached as far as Venango Street and connected to the zone along Kensington Avenue along this Allegheny Avenue spine. Upriver of Venango Street, however, remained largely open with the exception of a large sewage treatment plant that the city created at the end of Wheatsheaf Lane, where a plant is located to this day. Urban infrastructure on this large scale was further created in this period with the construction of two large, coal-fired electric plants. The first of these was the 1919-1920 Philadelphia Electric Company Delaware Generating Plant, built on the site of the shuttered Neafie & Levy complex. The Electric Company facility was, of course, coal fired, and located conveniently near to the Port Richmond Depot. This was followed by the Richmond Station, built in 1923-25. Both were designed by Philadelphia city architect John T. Windrim and survive to the present.

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68 For photographic documentation of this project see Adam Levine, “Aramingo Canal, Then and Now,” http://www.philly2o.org/backpages/AraCan.htm. Some real estate atlases suggest that this project was at least planned for if not underway by the mid-1890s.

69 See project records available at www.philadelphiabuildings.org.
Figure 15. G. W. and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia (North Philadelphia) Lehigh Ave. to Wingohocking Street, Wards 25, 33, 37, 38, 43 & 45* (Philadelphia, 1925), Plate 32.
Fourth period of development: Decline and Redevelopment – the Depression to today

Although the Cramp company facilities were reawakened from the dead for production for World War II, the fate of the planning district and Richmond in particular was sealed by the shift away from the use of coal and the demise of the city’s industrial base in the twentieth century. Today, there is little evidence above ground that testifies to the remarkable level of activity represented in the Coal Depot and the Cramp Shipyard, and the key place these facilities held in the history of the city and of the nation. Today, a massive coal tipper concrete structure on site today, built to dump a boxcar’s worth of coal into a ship’s hold, serves as a reminder of the order of magnitude of the former operations at the Port Richmond facilities. The demise of coal as a fuel source and competition with trucking as a means of moving freight ultimately led to the bankruptcy of the Reading Railroad in 1971, sealing the fate of the yards. The massive Port Richmond yards ceased operations in 1976 when the Reading was absorbed into Conrail.

As might be expected, the planning district suffered with the decline of the city’s industrial economy. Although industry did not completely leave the area until after World War II, it is clear that by the period of the Depression, the area was past its economic prime. The character of the built environment and a snapshot of the ethnicity and economic class status of the residents of the planning district 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 the 1936 and 1937 reports of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation. 70

Brewer’s map indicates that the area was predominantly white, with a significant number of Italian immigrants in Port Richmond. A relatively small enclave of African-Americans could be found straddling the Pennsylvania Railroad line in Port Richmond/Kensington between Cambria and Somerset streets. Although Brewer classified the vast majority of the area as “non-ethnic” white, he also characterized the quality of residential as poor, grading none of it above “C” or middle class, and finding a number of concentrations of what he characterized as “lower class” and “decadent,” particularly in Fishtown and the older, adjacent parts of Kensington.

The Home Owner’s Loan Corporation reports of the late 1930s provide a complementary picture. In 1936, the HOLC lumped the area of the planning district with all of North Philadelphia east of Broad Street. All of the area of the planning district except for Bridesburg was classified as “hazardous,” and as “very old, mainly obsolete and consisting almost entirely of two, three and four story brick row houses, averaging in age from fifty years or more.” Interestingly, the report addresses the interwoven industry in the area in pejorative terms, despite the fact that it was the economic engine of the district. In 1937, the HOLC characterized the River Wards as being affected by the noxious odor producing city sewage plant, and as being inhabited by “laborers,” half of whom were immigrants.

70 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.
The revival of the Cramp yards during World War II was key to Port Richmond, but nothing took its place after the war. Instead, the forces of infrastructure construction and redevelopment have most affected the built environment of the planning district since 1945. After the redirection of Frankford Creek to its present straight alignment (see above), chief among these was the creation of I-95, which severed the connection of the riverfront communities to the river and led to the demolition of significant number of historic buildings and structures in its right-of-way. The process has continued to the present, with the demolition of the last remaining building of the Cramp yards in advance of the creation of a new interchange at Girard Avenue. The arrival of the highway, and connections made possible with the construction of the Betsy Ross Bridge (see Historic Context Study for Cluster 1) spurred the creation of truck terminals and smaller industrial parks southwest of the bridge in the planning district.

In recent decades, residential redevelopment and gentrification have made their way from Old City and Northern Liberties into Fishtown and even into Port Richmond. The city’s recent masterplan for the central Delaware River waterfront, which stretched up to Allegheny Avenue as its northern limit, has put new attention on the River Wards and their future, but implementation of any redevelopment projects is still in the future in this portion of the city.
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