HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT FOR UNIVERSITY CITY PLANNING DISTRICT

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Introduction

The University City Planning District (figure 1) is understood today as a community related to a group of academic institutions that have grown in the eastern portion of West Philadelphia beginning with the relocation of the University of Pennsylvania from Center City in the period after the Civil War. The area is defined today by the campuses of these institutions and their surrounding residential and commercial community. The University City district, however, encompasses areas that, while they have common historical threads and share a geographic relationship to the Schuylkill River and Cobbs Creek, were not understood historically as a single zone in the way that some other planning districts of the city were (the Lower Northeast, for example). Thus, the present community brings together a number of zones with different historic patterns of development and uses.

This planning district is one where a notably large number of historic districts have been created, largely through the incentive of the Investment Tax Credit program by the former Clio Group, Inc., whose offices were located in the district. Further, the history of the area has been extensively documented through efforts of the staff of the Archives of the University of Pennsylvania (http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/wphila/history/history_tc.html). These documents cover such important facts as the specific styles of architecture and demographics related to the development of residential areas in Powelton, Hamilton Village, and Garden Court. This historic context statement, therefore, emphasizes events, patterns, and areas not covered by the existing historic districts and University of Pennsylvania sources.
Geographical Summary

Geographically (figure 2), the University City Planning District is defined by its relationship to the Schuylkill River, which forms its eastern boundary. South of the Mantua neighborhood, one of the highest points in the planning district, where there is a steep bluff, the river front is relatively broad. Historically, the largest stream that emptied into the river in the district was Mill Creek, which flowed across West Philadelphia roughly north-south from Montgomery County and today is culverted. Two smaller streams (Perch and Botanic creeks) also flowed into the river on either side of what is now Bartram’s Gardens, and which was the Bartram estate in the eighteenth century. Cobbs Creek forms the western boundary of the district, and the land falls off relatively gradually in the southwestern portion of the district toward the creek, until 59th Street, where the grade is steep down to the creek bed. Historically, Thomas’s Run, a stream whose bed lay roughly in the path of 55th Street, emptied into Cobbs Creek at the point where it bends sharply at around the western end of Penridge Street. Other than the broad slopes and steep grades to the waterways, the topography of the district is relatively flat, with low hills at 43rd and Locust streets (Spruce Hill), and along Baltimore Avenue at 49th Street and 53rd Street, in addition to the bluff at Mantua.
First period of development: Kingsessing settlement and the first English arrivals – 17th Century

The University City Planning District lies within portions of two former townships created in the outlying areas of Philadelphia at the turn of the eighteenth century: Blockley and Kingsessing. These names embody the two main strains of historic origin of the district. On the one hand, Blockley, which encompassed all of the land in the city west of the Schuylkill River roughly north of Baltimore Avenue, recalls the English origins of the Pennsylvania Colony through its namesake village in Gloucestershire. On the other hand, Kingsessing reflects the earliest period of Philadelphia area settlement and the connections to the Lenni Lenape people through toponym.
Like a number of locations in Philadelphia, the area of what is now University City was the locus of European settlement before the establishment of the Pennsylvania Colony. Kingsessing, like many other early Philadelphia place names, is a corruption of a Lenape word, and relates to topography, meaning a “place where there is a meadow.”

The Kingsessing settlement, which lay near Cobbs Creek roughly along Kingsessing Avenue near the southwest corner of the University City Planning District, was, at the time of its creation, the largest concentration of immigrants of the New Sweden settlement of the mid-seventeenth century. Like the concentrations of Swedish immigrants along the Delaware River that are better known, such as Wicaco and Shackamaxon, Kingsessing’s location most likely represents a former Lenni Lenape village. The Kingsessing settlement, also known as Fort Vasa, was established in the mid-seventeenth century. It consisted of “five families of freemen dwelt together in houses two stories high, built of whitenut [hickory] tree.” Governor Printz of the New Sweden colony had a
mill constructed on Cobbs Creek near the settlement; one of, if not the first built in the Philadelphia region by European settlers.¹

Something of the character of Swedish settlement, initial land division, and the general state of development in the Planning District at the turn of the eighteenth century is indicated by Thomas Holme’s 1681 Map of the Improved Part of the Province of Pennsilvania in America (figure 4). The area that would become University City is delineated in holdings of various sizes and configurations, including several lots outside of the planning district that ran roughly east-west from the river's marshy bank to the back of the land for the "Sweeds Mill" (the Printz mill on Cobbs Creek). The largest property was owned by Peter Yocum, son of immigrant Peter Jochimsson. In addition to farming in the planning district, Yocum owned a small gristmill on Mill Creek near the Schuylkill, was an Indian trader working with his half-brother, and served as an Indian translator for William Penn. Several of Yocum's children remained in Kingsessing.² In addition to marking the Swedish occupation of the planning district, the Holme map also gives a sense of purchase and settlement by English immigrants: it is notable that the area north of the Yocum lands is not indicated as having been purchased or "improved" at the date of Holme's map.

Notable among the few English names in the district at this point is Thomas Paschall, a pewterer who emigrated from Bristol as a relatively wealthy man. Paschall, for whom the Philadelphia neighborhood of Paschallville is named, purchased 500 acres from William Penn and arrived in the colony in 1682. His letter to a friend in Chippenham, Wiltshire, was printed in London by Quaker publisher John Bringhurst the year it was written, 1683, and is one of the earliest accounts of the Pennsylvania colony to appear in print; it was quickly translated into Dutch and French. Paschall's description documents the Swedish immigrants' building practices, noting that they used "but little Iron in Building, for they will build, and hardly use any other toole but an Ax; They will cut down a Tree, and cut him off when down, sooner than two men can saw him, and rend him into planks or what they please; only with the Ax and Wooden wedges." Paschall also recorded that at the time of his letter, he had cleared six acres on his land "in the Schoolkill Creek."³

In the decades following Paschall's letter, the Swedish residents of Kingsessing became increasingly absorbed into English culture. In 1760, Swedish Lutheran minister Carl Magnus Wrangel, traveling to Philadelphia, found that, when visiting Kingsessing, that its residents were "losing all connections with the Swedish Lutheran Religion." Wrangel, preaching in the "houses of

the settlers," led to the establishment of a school and church: St. James, Kingsessing, which was built in 1762 of local stone at a location that is now 68th Street and Woodland Avenue.4

In the seventeenth century, the Swedish settlement at Kingsessing had no direct overland connection to the growing Philadelphia development on the bank of the Delaware. In the early portion of the eighteenth century, connections across the Schuylkill on the eastern edge of the district, as well as those across the district, would begin to shape the development of what was to become University City.

Figure 4. Detail, Thomas Holme, Map of the Improved Part of the Province of Pennsilvania in America, 1681.

Second Period of Development: Estates of the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries

In the early eighteenth century, three points crossing the Schuylkill were established that linked the original city, growing along the Delaware banks, to areas to the west and to the south. These three crossings were named simply the upper, middle, and lower ferries. Equally as important, roads were created that led directly west (Market Street), to the northwest (Lancaster and Haverford avenues) and the southwest (Woodland Avenue) from these ferries. The upper ferry, also known as Scull's Ferry, crossed the river at Spring Garden Street. A road that would become Haverford Avenue connected to Lancaster Avenue, and, continuing west, passed a mill on Mill Creek at approximately Haverford Avenue and 46th Street.

From the middle ferry at Market Street, the Marshall Road, which was opened in 1724 and which no longer exists in the city, took an irregular course west and eventually crossed Cobbs Creek where Marshall Road begins today at the city border. In 1733, the first efforts were made to create a road connecting the settlements in Lancaster to the middle ferry by a new road. This crucial westward connection, which eventually became Lancaster Avenue, was completed in the 1740s.

The route that would later be Woodland Avenue, early on called the Darby Road because it led to the settlement at Darby on the other side of Cobbs Creek, became the main access to points south of the city. In 1725, a road was opened between Market Street and the mill on Mill Creek near the Schuylkill, but the Darby Road did not connect directly to Market Street until after the Revolution. Instead, the main connection to the southbound road was the lower, or Gray's Ferry, operated by members of the Gray family, who owned land on both sides of the river from the 1740s. Gray's Ferry was located, not surprisingly, where Gray's Ferry Avenue exists today. Thus, this point of crossing, and Gray's Ferry Avenue, constituted the main crossing of the Schuylkill for those leaving the original city travelling to other established places such as Darby and Chester, rather than the road at the Market Street, or middle ferry, crossing. A floating bridge was constructed there before the Revolution (figure 5).

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7 Deed information in "Mapping West Philadelphia, Landowners in October 1777."
By the mid-eighteenth century, both Blockley and Kingsessing townships remained sparsely populated. In 1741, the two townships, including, of course, areas outside of the University City district, had only a combined 132 taxables (property owners). The character of the level of development and its distribution is relatively readily understood by the Scull and Heap map of 1752 (figure 6). This map shows a consistent pattern of settlement associated primarily with the Darby Road as the principal spine, with descendants of the Swedish settlers remaining primarily to the southwest of the planning district. The Marshall Road served as a second focus of development, with a small number of mills along Cobbs and Mill creeks. Among the former, the Scull and Heap map shows the property of James Coultras, who, while not of Swedish descent, converted to Lutheranism and was the principal patron of the construction of St. James Kingsessing.

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11 Johnson, “St. James, Kingsessing”: 47.
James Duffin’s mapping of landholdings in the city in 1777 indicates, as the number of taxables suggests, that these were mostly large estates, or farms, particularly along the river and in the northern end of Kingsessing Township. For example, the Warner estate, which stretched back from the river’s edge at Girard Avenue at the northern end of the planning district (in Blockley Township), was a rectangular lot of 200 acres. Smaller properties generally lay inland.

Among the largest and earliest-established estates along the Schuylkill was that of John Bartram, whose 100+ acres were the site of the first American botanical garden; a small portion of

12 “Mapping West Philadelphia, Landowners in October 1777.”

the original property survives as Bartram’s Gardens today. The largest single landholding in the planning district, however, is not identified on the Scull and Heap map, because the family’s main estate, Bush Hill, lay on the other side of the river. The Hamilton landholding in the planning district was the property that would be developed beginning in the 1770s as the Woodlands.¹³

The development of the Woodlands (figure 7) just before, and its transformation shortly following the Revolution register a shift in both use and perception of the Schuylkill river landscape that rose after the mid-eighteenth century, when Philadelphia became the most populous and richest city in the colonies. In the period after 1750, the area along the Schuylkill, particularly from the planning district north, began to be the location of a group of country estates that marked the growing prosperity of the merchant city. In other words, as the city grew, its wealthier citizens increasingly sought the pleasures of suburban *otium* along the banks of the Schuylkill, where they retreated to their own villas or to one of several taverns along the river. To modern Americans, ancient Roman notions of country life may seem immeasurably distant from the Schuylkill villas, but they certainly were neither intellectually nor culturally distant from the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century owners of those villas. *Otium*, a difficult term to translate directly into modern American English, connotes the peace and quiet, the rest, the positive “nothing”-ness of country life, which was understood to be the obverse and the inseparable partner of *negotium*, or business.

![Figure 7. William Birch, Woodlands, from The Country Seats of the United States of North America, 1808](image)

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The change in perception from agricultural to suburban estate land use along the Schuylkill is embodied by the transformation of the Bartram house. The development of the Bartram house, which was enlarged in the 1760s from a relatively small stone dwelling to a much grander version, with its main front facing the river, reflects this. This work was being completed after the first country seats were being built along the Schuylkill in areas outside the planning district: Belmont (ca. 1742-1745), Laurel Hill (ca. 1762), Mt. Pleasant (1763), and Lansdowne (ca. 1773). Within the planning district, the first phase of construction at the Woodlands, begun 1770, and its expansion of the late 1780s epitomize this perception of the Schuylkill landscape that arose after mid-century.

During the 1780s and 1790s, Philadelphia was distinct among the cities of the new nation for both its political significance and its prosperity. Philadelphia had become the largest and wealthiest city of the American colonies before the Revolution. To this economic prominence and material sophistication was added the significance of the national and state capitals. The city was at the height of its prominence during the last decade of the eighteenth century, when the residence of the federal government was established by the Compromise of 1790, which also decreed, unfortunately, that the government would leave for Washington in 1800. An outgrowth of this level of urban cultural development was the amount of its suburban development, particularly along the Schuylkill.

These post-Revolution Schuylkill properties, particularly those built in the last decade of the eighteenth century, were different from those of earlier generations. They were often smaller, and their owner/developers were frequently merchants, particularly at the end of the eighteenth century. Although John Penn (“the poet”) was neither a Philadelphian nor a merchant, the predominant characteristics of this final era in Schuylkill villa development was established by the features of his estate, the Solitude (figure 8), created in 1784, and now on the grounds of the Philadelphia Zoo within the planning district. The Solitude was established as a property with a designed landscape, with agricultural activity only in the form of a kitchen garden, with a small, cubic house on the scale of a casino in many larger contemporary gardens in Europe and Britain. Echo, the property of David Beveridge, which was located in a triangular property today bounded by the river, Haverford Avenue, and 33rd Street, was another example in the planning district of this type of house, as was Eaglesfield, which was the northernmost villa estate in the planning district.14 Between Echo and Market Street, and bounded on the west by the Lancaster road, was nearly 200 acres (purchased in 1775) owned collectively by Samuel Powel and his brother-in-law Thomas Willing, who were among the wealthiest members of Philadelphia society around the time of the Revolution. The name of their estate, Powelton, would later be used for the neighborhood that rose in this area. After Samuel Powel died in a Yellow Fever epidemic in 1793, his widow built a grand house on the property,

which was later expanded by her nephew John Hare, whom she adopted as her son to become John Hare Powel.

The second development that would strongly influence the turn-of-the-century merchants’ villas as well as the landscape of the Schuylkill itself came with the substantial changes wrought at the Woodlands beginning in 1788-1789. After his return from self-imposed exile in England in 1786, William Hamilton went about transforming the existing house into a Palladian, portico-fronted villa and creating a landscape garden around this fashionable dwelling. Among the salient features of the house was the introduction of a relatively new (to the young United States) aesthetic of room plans which relied on curvilinear geometry, including ovals. One of the key features of his new garden was the greenhouse Hamilton had constructed, and one of the most significant aspects of Hamilton’s activities was his collection and propagation of exotic species.

At the Woodlands, there was a clear, picturesque relationship between the house and garden, calculated for specific sorts of picturesque experiences of landscape. The visitor’s progress from the main entrance through the house toward the Schuylkill was one that opened up dramatically to embrace the view. In the decades following the Revolution, numerous descriptions of the aesthetic and artistic qualities of the Schuylkill landscape appeared in early national magazines.  

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which stood on the western shore of the river, was often celebrated in print and in traveler’s
descriptions as a place of extraordinary musical public entertainment, and for the quality of the
natural scenery as well as the remarkable gardens there.\textsuperscript{16}

Third Period of Development: Internal Improvements and the Development of a Suburban
District before the Civil War

\textit{‘Internal Improvements’}

In the period after the Revolution, while the villa district along the Schuylkill was at its most
flourishing, other developments on the river and in the planning district of a seemingly very
different character, but that were also very much part of the culture of this period, were taking place.
The country life of the elite may seem far removed from projects like the construction of canals and
turnpikes, but they were closely linked by the common concept of “improvement.” In essence, the
cultural refinement that was represented by villa life was paralleled by “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”; they are generally considered to have a negative aesthetic character, and
to be antithetical to the enjoyment of the river landscape of the period. In the decades following the
Revolution, however, these improvements were literally the stuff of nation-building, and were
perceived as the means of creating a new country that would rival more established (European)
civilizations. Further, and crucially, these improvements were not seen as having a negative aesthetic
effect on the landscape. Internal improvements along the Schuylkill in the planning district, as the
crucial western gateway for the developing city further east, were to have a direct effect on
University City’s development pattern in the nineteenth century.

The first of these projects was the creation of one of the most important turnpike projects
of the early republic in Pennsylvania: the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike. The planning for
improvement of the existing road began in 1786, and this “macadamized” (i.e., gravel and substrate)
turnpike was essentially complete in 1794.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} See, for example, “On the beauties of Grays’ Gardens, on the river Schuylkill,” \textit{Universal Asylum} (1790):
357-8. On the extensive developments at Gray’s Inn gardens, see William Parker Cutler and Julia Perkins
Cutler, \textit{Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, L.L.D.} (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1888),
p. 145.
\textsuperscript{17} Landis, The First Long Turnpike, Part II.
The Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike was followed by an even more important undertaking: the construction of the first bridge across the Schuylkill (figure 9). The cornerstone was laid in 1798 for a wooden bridge on stone piers and abutments at the Market Street crossing. The plan by Timothy Palmer was completed and the “Permanent Bridge” opened to traffic on January 1, 1805. Construction of other bridges across the Schuylkill followed before the War of 1812, including a single-arch example at the upper ferry in the planning district. The structure of the Upper Ferry Bridge was designed and built by German immigrant Lewis Wernweg and exterior designed by Philadelphia architect Robert Mills.

Even more important for the transformation of the planning district if not for all of Philadelphia, was the completion in the 1820s of the Fairmount Dam and Waterworks and the Schuylkill Navigation canal system (figure 10). The dam, because it raised the level of the water of the river, forever changed the perception of the Schuylkill landscape, and the fashionable villa district began to lose its luster. More important, however, the arrival of anthracite coal in the city, by the canal and other modes of conveyance, began to lead to the development of industry in Philadelphia, which would shape its future.

Figure 9. William Russell Birch and Thomas Birch, Schuylkill Bridge High Street Philadelphia, from The City of Philadelphia in 1800, second edition, 1806.

One more final infrastructure change in the early nineteenth century would have a long-range effect on the planning district and the city at large: the connection of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad between these cities in the 1830s. In 1838, the double-track line was completed between Wilmington and Gray’s Ferry, and the floating bridge that had been the chief connector to the south for Philadelphians was replaced with a dedicated railroad bridge. Thus, the connections across the river for all but rail traffic were removed from what had been this main point of crossing for vehicles and livestock. Further, this important rail line, while it served the city, had no station in the planning district when it was created.

Residential and institutional development in the early nineteenth century

Just as William Hamilton strongly influenced the shape of land use and development along the Schuylkill in the period after the Revolution, he also shaped the development of the University City district in the nineteenth century through the first planned residential development: the creation of “Hamiltonville,” (figures 11, 12) which later came to be known as Hamilton Village.

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Figure 11. Detail, Peter C. Varlé map of Philadelphia, showing planned grid for West Philadelphia, 1802

Figure 12. Detail, John Hills, *Plan of the City of Philadelphia and Environs*, 1808, showing Hamilton Village.

Hamilton began his development in 1808, and the character of the area immediately to the west of the then-new bridge was described in some detail by James Meese in his 1811 guide book,
Picture of Philadelphia. In providing his reader with recommendations for excursions from the city (then still concentrated along the Delaware River front), Meese suggests, among other routes, travelling west on Market Street to the recently completed Permanent Bridge. His account reflects the transitional state of the area on the western shore of the Schuylkill. He notes that “from the middle of this bridge . . . the eye will be gratified by a fine prospect of both shores, some handsome country seats being on the bank, and the land agreeably undulated.” On the western shore, Meese reported manufacturing related to new construction in the area: “ascending the hill, we come to the board-yard of Messrs. McIlvains, where a few minutes may be agreeably passed away in viewing an expeditious contrivance to dress shingles, by knives fixed in a wheel, which is connected with a shaft, turned by a horse.” Meese goes on to reinforce the new bridge as the gateway west for the city and to remark on the new development near it, saying that “the road due west, leads through the village of Hamilton . . . The great southern post road passes to the left: proceeding down it, you have a fine view of the city.” Tellingly, Meese notes the changes on the north side of the bridge and their relationship to earlier settlement activities: “on the right are seen the progressive inclosures and improvements of land, which, after the woods had been cut down, was suffered to grow up into a thicket, almost impenetrable, until the recent sale of the lots. Finally, he predicts the coming development of the area and its character: “in a few years the land will be covered with the boxes of the citizens, whose avocations may not permit a more distant retreat from the heat of the town.”

In other words, the elite suburban villa district of the eighteenth century was becoming transformed into a middle class suburb of the growing city further east, thanks to the access provided by the new bridges. Thus, the Hamilton Village development marked the beginning of the shift from villa district to commuting suburb in the University City district.

In contrast to the beginnings of developments on the Hamilton Estate, and the other activities in Blockley Township, Kingsessing remained relatively undeveloped in the early nineteenth century: in fact, it was one of three of the total thirteen townships in Philadelphia’s County to lose population between 1820 and 1830. In 1833, a writer for the Saturday Evening Post described the township and its state of development. The author noted that Kingsessing “retains more of the primitive character of its early settlement than almost any other” township in Philadelphia County, and that “the law and lawyers are unknown in this happy district, where industry [i.e., industriousness] is wealth, and virtue nobility.” In addition to the “one church” (St. James) the area notably had a “meeting house for blacks.”

22 “Kingsessing,” Atkinson’s Casket No. 5 (1833): 204.
of African-American residents than Blockley (9%) in 1830, when Blockley had three times the numbers of total residents as Kingsessing (approximately 1,070 vs. 3,400). No enslaved workers lived in either township at that point, and both townships had a considerable number of households headed by free blacks. 23 Despite their smaller numbers relative to Kingsessing, the African-American residents of Blockley Township founded the Monumental Baptist Church that survives to this day: the Monumental Baptist Church first met in private homes in the 1820s, and then built their first building, at 41st and Ludlow streets, in 1844.24 Mount Pisgah AME church, one of the earliest offshoots from Mother Bethel, was organized in 1833, and also met in private homes until a frame building was constructed on the south side of 4000 block of Locust.25

After William Hamilton’s death in 1813, the subdivision of lands for Hamilton Village began in earnest. In conjunction with the developments in Hamilton Village in the period before the Civil War, changes along the Schuylkill, and the introduction of the railroad, the district, the district became, like other areas that were both peripheral and accessible, the locus of large, rural cemeteries and of large institutions. The first of the latter, built on a portion of the Hamilton estate southeast of Woodland Avenue and north of the Woodlands itself, was the Blockley Almshouse, designed by William Strickland and completed in 1834, replacing the Alms House and House of Employment that stood at 10th and Spruce streets, when the city’s development reached this point as it moved west from the Delaware. The Blockley Almshouse faced another great institutional work of Strickland’s, the Naval Home, across the river. Just as the creation of the Blockley Almshouse registered the move of an existing institution that had once stood on the periphery of the city, the next institutional development in the planning district represented the expansion of a long-standing one. In 1841, Pennsylvania Hospital completed the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane between 42nd and 46th streets north of Market. A young Samuel Sloan, who would design a number of single and double houses throughout the planning district before the Civil War as the area grew, and who had worked on the Blockley Almshouse as a carpenter, was responsible for much of the project.26 In 1840, the Woodlands itself became a cemetery, following the model of Laurel Hill further upstream on the Schuylkill. Mount Moriah, at the southwest corner of the planning district, followed in 1855.

Charles Ellet’s Map of the County of Philadelphia of 1843 registers the growth in and around Hamilton Village by this date. At this point, Hamilton Village stretched as far west as 41st Street, between Market Street and Woodland Avenue, with single or twin houses scattered on the grid of

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23 U. S. Census.
streets that had developed there. In addition, a small industrial village called “Maylandville” had grown up around the early nineteenth-century Jacob Mayland mill at the point where Woodland Avenue crossed Mill Creek on the south side of the Woodlands. The Mayland Mill was located at the southern end of a large mill/ice pond where Clark Park is located today. Crucially, a group of wharves had been built along the river’s edge just south of Market Street to around Chestnut Street, and a canal created bypassing the bridge itself west of the river, indicating the beginnings of commercialization and industrialization in this area. To the north of Hamilton Village, other areas were sufficiently developed to have acquired individual names. “Greenville” was located to the north of Market, and was centered around 38th and Lancaster, and Powelton and Mantua -- accessible from not only the Market Street Bridge but also the Upper Ferry Bridge -- were also developing. An important index of the level of growth was the creation of the West Philadelphia Borough in Blockley Township in 1844 (figure 13). By 1855, at least four churches had been established in Hamilton Village (figure 14). In contrast to the growth in Blockley Township, the northern portion of Kingsessing Township remained essentially unchanged, and occupied by the descendants of early inhabitants such as the Yocum family.

Figure 13. Detail, Blockley and Kingsessing Townships Map, 1844, from Daly and Weinberg, Genealogy of Philadelphia County Subdivisions, showing the boundaries of West Philadelphia Borough

27 “Villages and Settlements Formerly Included in the City and County of Philadelphia, “Public Ledger Almanac for 1881, p. 7.
Figure 14. Detail, Jones D. Scott, *Scott’s Map of the Consolidated City of Philadelphia*, 1855.

Along with this growing residential development, a number of mills were established in the district as the city’s industrial base grew. In the 1820s and 1830s, new water-powered textile mills were built along Mill and Cobbs Creeks. With the growth of the use of steam power, factories began to be built away from the creeks in succeeding decades, including the West Philadelphia Flint Glass...
Works, constructed at 33rd and Market Streets in the 1850s, and a complex built by William D. Parrish at 30th and Chestnut Streets that produced both iron castings and vegetable-based buttons was begun around 1840.28

The 1850s brought other crucial changes to the planning district in connection with the developing West Philadelphia Borough. In the early 1850s, the first bridge across the Schuylkill at Girard Avenue was completed, and the Philadelphia and West Chester Railroad and the Columbia Railroad, both of which would become absorbed into the Pennsylvania Railroad system, first crossed the river at Market Street. These lines branched north and south along the river. By 1856, a depot and engine house had been built at the eastern end of Hamilton Street, which was the nucleus of a railyard that would grow to substantial proportions in the coming decades and eventually lead to the creation of the 30th Street Station. In the 1850s, however, this depot stood adjacent to a race track to its south (figure 15). To the south of Market Street, several large factories had been constructed near the river adjacent to the wharves that had been built there (figure 16). These two developments signaled the beginning of the end to the suburban character of the waterfront within the district in the former Blockley Township.

![Figure 15. Detail, John Bachman, Bird’s Eye View of Philadelphia, 1857, with West Philadelphia north of Market Street in the foreground, showing engine house at center bottom.](image)

Fourth Period of Development: Residential build-out and institutional development, 1860s to the 1920s

In the aftermath of the Civil War, as the city’s industrial base continued to expand and its downtown developed with the construction of City Hall at Broad and Market Streets, University City continued to see growth as a streetcar suburb. In this period, much of the area of the planning district continued to develop as a middle- and upper middle-class bedroom community, with a range of housing stock that varied between row houses of various scales to grand single residences on large lots. The total population in the former Blockley and Kingsessing townships grew nearly tenfold between 1850 and 1900.29 In contrast to the growing residential community, the area along the river from the Pennsylvania Railroad’s depot south became increasingly industrialized (with notable exceptions such as Bartram’s Gardens). Crucially from the point of view of its present character, a significant number of institutions came into the area, including the University of Pennsylvania. In the period between the Civil War and the early twentieth century, a number of African-American enclaves developed in the area, although the district remained predominantly white. African-

Americans never reached above approximately 5.5% of the population in the period between 1850 and 1900, having represented over 7% in the middle of the nineteenth century in Blockley and Kingsessing. In 1888, St. Michael and All Angels Chapel, founded in 1889, was established as an Episcopal Mission at 43rd and Wallace streets just north of the planning district, joining Monumental Baptist and Mount Pisgah as the third African-American congregation west of the Schuylkill. St. Michael and All Angels, marking the beginning of what would become an African-American neighborhood around Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane on the north side of Market Street. Another African-American neighborhood that developed later, probably after the turn of the twentieth century, was found just to the southwest of the Woodlands, where St. Monica Episcopal Mission church was founded around 1914.

By 1862, residential development could be found throughout Powelton within the planning district, and this area of the district was served by horse car lines that crossed the river at Market and Spring Garden Streets and traveled along Spring Garden, Haverford Avenue, and 35th and 36th Street. In contrast, the area of the district south of Market Street was served by the single line that ran on Woodland Avenue. In this portion of the city, streets had been laid out as far west as 42nd Street, although construction was still sparse west of 39th Street. Churches of several denominations had been established in the area, indicating a variety of white ethnic groups. Commercial construction was concentrated along Market Street.

In 1866, the 27th Ward was subdivided from the 24th – which had been all of the area of the city west of the Schuylkill after the 1854 Consolidation – at Market Street, indicating the level of development in the residential areas north of Market Street. By 1865, a bridge at Chestnut Street had been built across the river (figure 17), followed by one at South Street by 1872. The Pennsylvania Railroad had acquired the land east of 31st Street and north of Market Street. By 1872, a sea of tracks as well as service facilities had begun to fill this area, and a passenger depot stood on the north side of Market Street between 30th and 31st streets. At the end of the 1870s, a large stock yard with pens and an abattoir had been installed between 30th Street and the river (figure 18).

30 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
Figure 17. Detail, R. L. Barnes, *Map of the Whole Incorporated City of Philadelphia*, 1865.
While textile mills, still reliant on water power at least in part, remained the dominant yet relatively dispersed sector in the University City area, steam-powered industrial metal goods facilities began to be established in relationship to the Pennsylvania Railroad lines in the territory of the planning district. For example, the Junction Car Works and Flue Mill began to develop into a large
complex of buildings beginning in the early 1860s between 31st and 32nd below Chestnut Street. In the early 1870s, the area around 52nd Street and Lancaster Avenue, just outside the University City Planning District, became an area of concentrated industry known as Hestonville. By 1866, a petroleum storage yards and wharf belonging to Wallace & Curtiss was located just south of the Chestnut Street Bridge, and the Phoenix Petroleum refining works had been established along the river just outside the district. Petroleum, although not yet exploited for internal combustion engines, served as a substitute for whale oil after its discovery in western Pennsylvania just before the Civil War.

In contrast to the growing industry and railroad area along the river, in the decade after the Civil War, residential construction (still concentrated in the former Blockley Township and the northeastern portion of the former Kingsessing Township) remained suburban in style. Single and double houses predominated, although there were also scattered residential and commercial rows to be found in the planning district, including, for example, the 3400 block of Sansom Street (National Historic District). By 1872, construction had reached 43rd Street and Market on the west. The ice pond and ice house on Mill Creek had been subsumed, and the creek itself had been culverted in and around the grand Clarence Clark estate, which lay between Locust and Pine, 42nd and 43rd streets, except for a pond that was part of Clark’s picturesque garden on his property. The area south of Market Street was increasingly served by horse car lines, and the city’s street grid had arrived at 47th Street between Baltimore and Woodland avenues on the southwest. South of this stood a depot for the Darby Passenger Railroad horsecar lines along Woodland Avenue. Between Baltimore Avenue and Market Street west of about 47th Street, a large, undeveloped parcel was held by Eli Kirk Price, real estate developer and founder of the Woodlands Cemetery. Beyond this, in the northern portion of the former Kingsessing Township, the land still remained in relatively large agricultural estates. On the north side of Market Street in Powelton, there was a checkerboard of suburban style houses on relatively smaller lots (the larger ones averaged about one-half a city block in size) reaching up to the Philadelphia Zoo (opened in 1874).

Arguably the most significant arrival of the 1870s in the planning district was the University of Pennsylvania. At the time of its opening in 1870, the university, like the Blockley Almshouse and Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane before it, moved from a location in the main portion of the city that had once been on Philadelphia’s edge (9th and Chestnut streets). Initially, as was typical for the period, the university campus consisted of a single building designed by Thomas Webb Richards

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36 See Hexamer Surveys.
37 See Hexamer Surveys.
and the land bounded by Woodland Avenue, Spruce Street and 34th and 36th streets (35th had never been cut through below Lancaster Avenue). This building, now College Hall, was joined by the Medical (later Logan) Hall within five years. Presbyterian Hospital, now affiliated with Penn, was founded at virtually the same time at 39th Street and Powelton Avenue, opening in 1872 under the leadership of minister Ephraim D. Saunders.

The 1880s marked a period of significant growth in the planning district. By 1886, almost all of the open lots in the portion of the district north of Market Street had been built on, with an increasing amount of rowhouse construction. The eastern end of the district south of Market was increasingly occupied by rowhouses as well, including the high-style versions designed by G. W. and W. D. Hewitt on St. Marks Place and nearby. The street grid had been developed out to 45th Street between Market Street and Baltimore Avenue. In the southwest portion of the district, rows of double houses were appearing in a number of locations, as well as small groups of row houses. A number of institutions had also located in this area, including the Philadelphia Home for Incurables, the Educational Home, the Episcopal Divinity School, and the Home for Destitute Colored Children, located just west of Mill Creek near its outlet at the Schuylkill. A fairly substantial rail yard had also developed near the river shoreline just west of Gray’s Ferry Avenue. Beyond 52nd Street, the district remained relatively rural, as it had for decades.

The industrial and rail area around Market and Chestnut streets and the river continued to grow as well as the residential areas of the district. By 1886, the Allison Junction Car and Flue Mill along 32nd Street took up several blocks, and smaller foundries and iron mills could be found in the vicinity. The rowhouse groups just west of this area presumably housed workers in these facilities. North of Market Street, the Pennsylvania Railroad yards continued to expand, with stockyard sheds east of 30th Street along the river and the addition of engine houses.

The University of Pennsylvania continued to expand as well, although it had not yet become a residential campus. By 1885, the first hospital building had been constructed south of Spruce Street, and a Veterinary “department” building was complete on the south side of Pine Street west of 36th Street. In 1888, Furness, Evans and Company completed designs for the university’s first library building (which survives as the Fine Arts library today) in addition to the Veterinary building (demolished).

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42 Thomas and Brownlee, *Building America’s First University*, p. 56.
The 1890s brought a significant shift in the district with the decision by University of Pennsylvania provost (a position equivalent to president today) Charles C. Harrison to expand the campus of his institution significantly and to create a residential student body. Between 1890 and 1910, the university under Harrison’s leadership expanded its academic programs significantly and “doubled its population and quadrupled its area.” In this period, Cope and Stewardson became the campus architects, creating a signature collegiate Gothic style beginning with the Quadrangle Dormitories that opened in 1896. 1891 brought the founding of the Drexel Institute by West Philadelphia resident and philanthropist Anthony J. Drexel. The institution’s purpose was to train students for industrial skills suited to Philadelphia’s economic base. Its new building, designed by the Wilson Brothers, remains Drexel University’s Main Building today. In contrast to Penn’s suburban location at the time of its relocation two decades earlier, Drexel was built in the densest industrial portion of the planning district, across the street from the Allison Junction Car Works. In 1897, the Philadelphia Commercial Museum, which was created as a “permanent world’s fair museum,” opened between the Blockley Almshouse and the Schuylkill River.

Between 1895 and 1910, the planning district was in essence built out for the first time, with the exception of two large swaths. The first of these was the property assembled by Eli Kirk Price at the western end of the planning district. This area was roughly bounded by 46th Street on the east, Walnut Street on the north, 50th Street on the west, and Baltimore Avenue on the south. The other tract that remained undeveloped lay to the south of the Pennsylvania Railroad’s West Chester line and to the northwest of Springfield Avenue.

In this period, the vast majority of the new construction was rowhouses, and the first public parks appeared in the planning district (other than the small portion of Fairmount Park in the district near the zoo as well as the zoo itself). The former Clarence Clark Estate became Clark Park, and Black Oak Woods (now Malcolm X) Park was created at 51st and Pine, just outside of the planning district. In addition to the growth of the University of Pennsylvania, another change of scale came to the district with the construction of high-rise hotel/apartment buildings, including Hamilton Court of 1901, which survives at 3900 Chestnut Street.

After World War I, the land that had been held by Eli Kirk Price began to be developed, when Clarence Siegel and other developers began to create single houses and an apartment building geared to automobile use in what was to become known as Garden Court (a National Historic

44 Thomas and Brownlee, Building America’s First University, p. 97.
District). The other area that had previously remained open to the northeast of Mount Moriah Cemetery was also developed, principally in rowhouse blocks.

Fifth Period of Development: City Beautiful Improvements, Urban Redevelopment, and Institutional Expansion, 1920s-Present

The 1920s and 1930s saw key transformations in the district along the Schuylkill River. Elsewhere in the city, reform and City Beautiful undertakings produced redevelopments and projects such as the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Roosevelt Boulevard. In the University City Planning District, the first redevelopment projects related to the facilities along the river and the connections across it. In the period following World War II, as part of the city's transformation of itself in this period, University City would be vastly changed inland from the waterfront by the extensive expansion of its principal academic institutions.

In 1924, Philadelphia lawyer and philanthropist John Frederick Lewis, working in association with the City Parks Association, a private organization, documented his perception of the lamentable state of the Schuylkill River waterfront within the planning district and downstream in a plea presented at a lecture given at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. This address, published by the City Parks Association, made the case for “redemption” of river’s waterfront below Fairmount, the “geographic center of the city.”

Lewis’s publication documents the complete industrialization of the waterfront by this date, and the environmental degradation that accompanied it (figures 19-21), including the “municipal dump in action,” while recalling the pastoral condition of the river in its earliest periods of development. Although he lauds such improvements as the recent completion of a grand new bridge at South Street, Lewis characterized the riverfront occupation as the “Schuylkill Banks Abused,” with “no occupation of any permanent importance except the railroads,” which he, citing similar projects in other cities, asserted should “run under embankments.” Lewis also advocated construction over the tracks, illustrating the Philadelphia “skyscraper” then being built on North Broad Street (figure 22).

46 George E. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Garden Court Historic District, 1984
Figure 19. View of the Schuylkill River from Walnut Street, looking southwest. From Lewis, *Redemption of the Lower Schuylkill*.

Figure 20. View of the Schuylkill River from Walnut Street, looking northwest. From Lewis, *Redemption of the Lower Schuylkill*. 

Figure 22. The Philadelphia Inquirer Building in construction, showing railroad running underneath. From Lewis, Redemption of the Lower Schuylkill.
Nothing like the waterfront promenade Lewis advocated would appear on the banks of the Schuylkill until the last decades of the twentieth century, when the Schuylkill River Park on the east side of the river was created. Construction over the tracks at Market Street in the late 1920s and early 1930s did, however, transform this portion of the river. Further, new bridges designed by Paul Cret changed the character of the river crossings into one that was significantly grander. In 1927, Cret designed the University Bridge that survives today, replacing the earlier Gray’s Ferry Bridge. A couple of years later, the architect undertook the design of a new bridge for the Pennsylvania Railroad across the river in conjunction with the creation of a new passenger station at 30th Street for the company. The new 30th Street Station, design by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, the Chicago architectural firm, was built between 1929 and 1934. Across Market Street, the United States central post office for the city, designed by local firms Rankin & Kellogg and Tilden, Register & Pepper, followed closely, and was finished in 1935. In addition to the activities at Market Street, not far to the south, Conventional Hall was built and opened in 1930, and the Blockley Almshouse, which had been converted to use as the Philadelphia Hospital, was demolished.

The character and ethnic make-up of the residential areas of the University City Planning District in the 1930s 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. According to Brewer’s map, none of the planning district was heavily industrialized at that date. Further, he found that the residential character of the district was ethnically mixed, if segregated. African-Americans were concentrated in neighborhoods around Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane, in portions of Mantua north of Brandywine Street (outside of the district), in the area south of the Woodlands between 45th and 47th streets, and in smaller pockets along Ludlow Street between 34th and 36th streets and between 40th and 42nd Street. Brewer also characterized the residents of Garden Court and nearby areas between 44th and 50th streets as Jewish, mostly intermixed with other whites; the area at the southwest corner of the planning district was also a Jewish neighborhood. Most of the planning district was classified by Brewer as a combination of “C” or middle class, with occasional pockets of “B,” or upper class homes, with the exception of the African-American neighborhoods, which were classified as a combination of “D” or lower class or “E” – “decent” The houses in the area below Baltimore Avenue between 45th and 50th streets north of Chester Avenue received the highest assessment - either “AB” (between highest and upper class) or B.

The Home Owner’s Loan Corporation reports of the late 1930s provide a complementary picture. In 1936, the HOLC characterized all of the area in the planning district north of Market

48 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.
Street as “hazardous,” as a “very old district containing many obsolete structures very largely of the three story row type,” and as having a “heavy Negro concentration throughout most the section [to 68th Street] with a substantial number of Italians.” Further, the HOLC noted that “some ten years ago” the area “enjoyed a tremendous boom based on expected business resulting from construction of what was supposed to be the Pennsylvania Railroad’s main station [i.e., 30th Street Station]. The station was built but practically no other development too place” presumably due to the Depression. Finally, the HOLC reported that this boom led to “complete collapse of inflated values” in the area.

Below Market Street, the HOLC also evaluated the zone between the University of Pennsylvania and 58th Street south of Market Street as “hazardous,” observing that the “structures are old, three story, row straight front brownstone and other trims. Near Market Street the District is largely Negro. South towards the University of Pennsylvania [the area] is made up of rooming houses and college fraternity houses” associated with student residence. In contrast, the HOLC found that the areas “south of Market Street and west from 45th Street to Cobbs Creek,” were “practically solid with substantial two story row houses of modest value but quite good class residents” who were “predominantly Jewish of white collar and skilled labor classes.” Finally, the HOLC noted that these last areas remained a “popular residential district” because of “quick and easy transportation to the center of the city.”

At the end of World War II, the area west of the Schuylkill was transformed into a University City, thanks to enormous expansion on the part of its educational institutions and urban redevelopment projects. In 1948, “after two decades of no building,” the University of Pennsylvania completed a Campus Master Plan that proposed considerable expansion west of the core at 34th and Spruce streets. In 1949, the Philadelphia Planning Commission issued its first annual report under the directorship of Edmund Bacon, following the 1945 passage of the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law, which enabled the creation of the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, and the 1949 federal Housing Act. The 1949 report outlined the first three project areas to be addressed under the new legislation and authorities of the nine that were certified in 1948: the Southwest Temple area, the “Triangle” south of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, and the University area (figure 23). The 1949 Annual Report asserted that the “redevelopment of the University Area will provide an appropriate setting for two of Philadelphia’s principal educational institutions, the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel Institute of Technology,” but also that “the proposed campus expansion of these two institutions will result in a large displacement of residents.”

In 1950, the Planning Commission issued its full plan for the University Area. The plan included the expansion of the University of Pennsylvania to 40th Street, and also a number of crucial measures that would change the character of the area that were already under construction in 1950.

49 Thomas and Brownlee, Building America’s First University, p. 114.
These included the removal of the “elevated structure on Market Street and its replacement by a subway system,” “the removal of streetcar lines on Woodland Avenue and their replacement of a subway-surface tunnel, with portal at 36th and Ludlow Streets, and surface lines on 36th Street to Woodland Avenue.” Other measure proposed at the time that would come to later fruition were the closing of Woodland Avenue from 38th Street to Market Street, the “development of 38th Street as a boulevard” between Woodland Avenue and Market Street, and the “extension of subway-surface tunnel from 36th and Ludlow Streets to 40th Street and Woodland Avenue.” The closure of 34th Street between Walnut and Spruce streets was also proposed to be completed after the Schuylkill Expressway (a crucial development itself at the edge of the planning district) was finished, although this never took place.51

In the decades following the 1950 plan, both the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University completed significant expansion projects. In the decade between 1950 and 1960, West Philadelphia (including territory outside of the planning district) became predominantly African-American for the first time.52 As one of its first post-war housing projects, the city undertook the creation of the Mill Creek redevelopment just to the north of the planning district, transforming a historic African-American neighborhood through designs by Louis Kahn. Following the

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52 Lloyd, “Notes on the historical development of population in West Philadelphia.”
completion of the Schuylkill Expressway, the eastern end of the district was further changed by the construction of a Convention Center for the city, now demolished.

Since the completion of the work envisioned in the 1950 plan, the universities of the planning district have continued to be the most important influence on physical changes in University City. Relatively recent efforts by the University of Pennsylvania under the presidency of Judith Rodin in the 1990s sought to encourage faculty investment and ownership and provide more residential options for students in the vicinity. The planning district remains one that is still largely divided between the mostly white and relatively affluent academic community and the poorer African-American neighborhoods that surround it.
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Maps


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