

# PHILADELPHIA'S URBAN LANDSCAPE EVOLUTION

## 200 YEARS OF CHANGE

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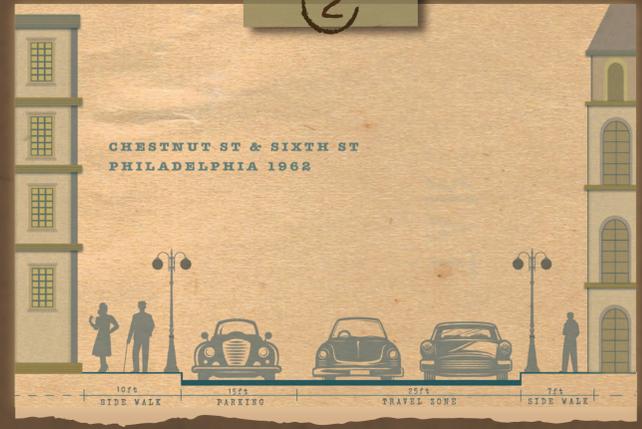


### 1960s Civil Rights Era

As elsewhere in major US cities, the 1960s was a turbulent decade for Philadelphia. The city's urban landscape was shaped by civil rights struggles, demographic shifts, urban renewal initiatives, and changing economic dynamics. Manufacturing and other major Philadelphia businesses, which had supported middle-class lives for the working class, were moving out of the area or shutting down in industrial restructuring, indicating major declines in railroads. However, the city had encouraged development projects in University City in West Philadelphia and the Temple University in North Philadelphia. Some gentrification occurred, with restoration of properties in historic neighborhoods.



One aspect of the urban renewal effort in mid 20th century was the redesign of streets and transportation networks to accommodate increasing automobile traffic and facilitate urban mobility. As part of these initiatives, major thoroughfares like Interstate 95 and the Vine Street Expressway were constructed. Chestnut St, for example, became a one-way street with double travel lanes and one parking lane. Overall, the redesign of streets prioritized vehicular traffic over other modes of transportation. Pedestrian amenities such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian signals were sometimes neglected or minimized in favor of accommodating cars and trucks. While these projects promised improved transportation efficiency, they also resulted in the demolition of thousands of homes and businesses, particularly in predominantly African American communities, leading to displacement and community dislocation.



### 1860s Civil War Era

In the mid and late 1850s, Philadelphia had evolved significantly from its colonial origins into an industrial and cultural center, as immigrants from Ireland and Germany streamed into the city, swelling the population of Philadelphia and its suburbs. The urban landscape of Philadelphia in this era was marked by rapid industrialization, expanding transportation networks, and the emergence of distinct neighborhoods. New factories and warehouses dotted the cityscape, while residential neighborhoods expanded outward from the city center. Despite the rapid pace of change, Philadelphia in the mid and late 1850s retained elements of its colonial heritage, with historic landmarks such as Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell serving as reminders of the city's storied past.

The 1960s sees the construction of modernist architectural landmarks and civic buildings in Philadelphia. However, meanwhile, historic preservation was becoming a key component of the city's redevelopment strategy, with organizations like the Philadelphia Historical Commission working to protect and maintain architecturally significant structures. Landmarks such as Independence Hall, with its meticulously restored rowhouses and cobblestone streets, served as symbols of Philadelphia's rich architectural heritage amidst the rapid pace of urban change. Under such effort, Society Hill was transformed back to a majority residential neighborhood. Streets in Old City were cleaned with the addition of various public green spaces.



Architecturally, the 1850s saw a shift towards more eclectic styles influenced by the Victorian era. Gothic Revival, Italianate, and Second Empire architecture became popular, adorning the facades of grand mansions, public buildings, and churches throughout the city. In addition to public buildings, Philadelphia's residential architecture underwent transformations during the 1850s, reflecting the tastes and preferences of the city's affluent residents. Rowhouses in fashionable neighborhoods such as Society Hill and Rittenhouse Square were adorned with elaborate cornices, ornamental ironwork, and intricately carved facades, showcasing the wealth and status of their owners.

### 1750s Colonial Era

Like any other cities in America, Philadelphia was generally dirty, with garbage and animals littering the streets in the first half of the 18th century. By the 1750s, however, Philadelphia was turning into a major city in the American colonies, boasting a rapidly growing population and a burgeoning economy. Its urban landscape was a blend of colonial architecture, bustling streets, and a layout that reflected the city's strategic importance as a center of commerce and culture.



At the heart of Philadelphia's 18th century urban design was its gridiron street plan, a hallmark of William Penn's visionary city planning. Laid out in a grid pattern, the streets intersected at right angles, creating square blocks that facilitated ease of navigation and efficient organization. Under this plan, spatial rationality and order were established, land use was regulated, and towns and country lots were properly allocated. This subsequently opened the possibilities for infrastructure and service planning to improve the living standards of early modern cities. During that period, Market Street and High Street (now Chestnut Street) served as the major thoroughfares and were paved and illuminated with oil lamps. These streets were lined with shops, taverns, and meeting houses, pulsating with the energy of a growing commercial hub. Along the border of the city, there were also some country estates, farms, and along the fast-running streams, a few mills. The city also developed culturally and scientifically as schools, libraries, and theaters were founded.

In the 1850s, the gridiron street plan continues to develop. As the city expanded rapidly due to industrialization and immigration, new streets were added, and existing ones widened to accommodate increased traffic and population growth. Street uses were managed more effectively during this period, with specific lanes dedicated for carriages and horses, as well as emerging mode of transportation such as streetcars. Railroads were built to connect Philadelphia to other major cities. Philadelphia's waterfront area was extended. Wharves and warehouses lined the waterfront, serving as vital hubs for the import and export of goods.



OLD CITY 1962

SOCIETY HILL 1862

QUEEN VILL 1750



Data Sources:  
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