



Timeline: The Northern Liberties

For approximately ten thousand years, the people that came to be called Delaware Indians had lived and traded amongst themselves and with other distinct native groups in the Delaware and Ohio River Valleys. The Delaware called themselves Lenni Lenape, meaning “original people.” By the time European settlers arrived in the 17th century, thriving Lenape settlements were spread throughout present-day eastern Pennsylvania, western New Jersey, and New York’s lower Hudson Valley.

The Lenni Lenape maintained good relations with William Penn, but during the two centuries following European colonization, increasingly hostile conditions displaced most of the Lenape population from the region. Many were driven to settle in the Midwestern United States, but a small number remained in their homeland here in the Delaware Valley. Today the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania, <http://www.lenapenation.org> numbers over 300 people, with communities in the Philadelphia region, Easton, and the Poconos. New Jersey and Delaware are also home to various tribes and communities of Lenape. And the legacy of the Lenni Lenape is ever-present in Philadelphia, thanks to the scores of Lenape-language place-names throughout the city and region— including Passyunk, Moyamensing, Cohocksink, Aramingo, Manayunk, and Schuylkill, to name just a few.

17th–18TH CENTURY

- **1682** William Penn established Philadelphia by negotiating a treaty with the Lenni Lenape at the village of Shackamaxon, on the Delaware River in what is today Fishtown. Penn divided Philadelphia into two parts: the City and the Liberties. Penn’s land rights policy granted bonus plots of free or “liberty lands” in the vast rural area above Vine Street—the Northern Liberties—to those who purchased lots in the original “city,” which is the area that corresponds to present-day Center City Philadelphia.
- **1684** The ship *Isabella* arrived in Philadelphia with the first shipment of African slaves.
- **1700-1701** Built as a grain mill for William Penn, the Governor’s Mill <http://www.philaplace.org/story/303/> near 3rd Street and Girard Avenue was one of the earliest industrial enterprises in Philadelphia. Situated near a three-acre pond and powered by the Cohocksink Creek, the mill struggled through its first century because of the lack of roads and the difficulty of transporting raw materials and finished goods through the marshy terrain of then-rural Northern Liberties. There followed a succession of owners and purposes over the course



of the 18th century, including ground corn, chocolate, and mustard production. In 1792, weaving machinery was installed to handle flax and hemp, and transformed the mill into one of the earliest water-powered textile mills. Aided by the advent of road-paving and marsh-filling, by 1832 the Globe Mill, as it was now named, generated over 500,000 pounds of cotton, and employed 114 men and women and 200 children. The Globe remained Pennsylvania's largest textile mill until 1850.

- **1780** The Pennsylvania Assembly passed the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in Pennsylvania, establishing Philadelphia as a destination for free blacks and runaway slaves. The free black community began settling in Northern Liberties as early as the 1790s, when the newly formed state legislature opened up land in the then-outlying district to relieve overcrowding in the city of Philadelphia proper. By the 1830s, Northern Liberties had a growing free black population and played an integral role in Philadelphia's Underground Railroad network.
- **1780s** The area to the west of 3rd Street was mostly grass lots, grazing commons and ponds belonging to English, Swedish, and Dutch settlers.
- **1790** The state legislature auctioned off land in Northern Liberties to relieve overcrowding in the city.
- **1793** The first major American yellow fever epidemic swept through Philadelphia killing an estimated 5,000 people and forced tens-of-thousands to evacuate the city.
- **1794** The establishment of the African Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church <http://www.philaplace.org/story/213/> at 4th and Brown Street signaled the growth of a free black community that would become an integral part of Pennsylvania's Underground Railroad. Zoar is the oldest Black congregation in United Methodism in continual existence.
- **1795** A marketplace was established on 2nd Street and remained active into the 20th century.



19TH CENTURY

- **By 1800** Land leveling and road construction began. Many of Northern Liberties' numerous ponds were drained, and their clay used to make the bricks that built blocks of row homes for workers. Development of narrow red-brick row houses two or three stories high became the dwelling places of the immigrant workforce.
- **1810-1860** The major industries of textiles and clothing, metal production, printing and publishing, and the production of leather and leather goods <http://www.philaplace.org/tags/782/> provided a need for specialized skills that attracted German artisans. Germans, <http://www.philaplace.org/tags/295/> the largest ethnic group in Northern Liberties during the 19th century, settled heavily in the Girard Avenue district.
- **1818** The first public schools were established to educate the poor at the city's expense. Two schools formed in Southwark, two in Moyamensing, two in Northern Liberties, and two in Penn Township, now part of North Philadelphia.
- **1820** Kensington was incorporated and became a self-governing district until it consolidated with the city of Philadelphia in 1854.
- **1838** Edgar Allen Poe moved to Philadelphia and lived at 7th and Spring Garden until 1844. This site is now a National Historic Site, <http://www.philaplace.org/story/262/> open to the public, and dedicated to interpreting Poe's life and work in Philadelphia.
- **1840s-1870s** The Irish arrived in great numbers as a result of famine and settled heavily in Kensington near St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church <http://www.philaplace.org/story/316/> and the Nanny Goat Market. This community was largely composed of Protestant and Catholic handloom weavers who worked in shanties or "factories" in the area.



- **1840** John Wagner, a Bavarian brew master, brewed the first successful lager beer and Kensington became home to a large number of lager beer manufacturers. German migration to Northern Liberties resulted in the explosion of brewing and brewing related industries in the area, including Ortlieb's <http://www.philaplace.org/story/275/> and Schmidt's <http://www.philaplace.org/story/319/>.
- **1844** On May 6, a nativist rally in Kensington ignited three days of anti-Irish Catholic riots that killed several residents and destroyed St. Michael's and St. Augustine's Roman Catholic churches, a seminary, and dozens of properties. Violence erupted again in July of the same year in South Philadelphia in the neighborhood of the Catholic Church of St. Philip Neri <http://www.philaplace.org/story/20/>.
- **1845** As a result of the riots of 1844, the City of Philadelphia and the districts of Spring Garden, Northern Liberties, and Moyamensing were required to organize a police force.
- **1848** Paschall's Alley, situated north of Green Street between 4th and 5th Streets, was home to 48 black families who aided in the operations of the Underground Railroad.
- **1850s** Northern Liberties' black population exceeded that of South Philadelphia's historically black Cedar Street Corridor (now South Street), and later absorbed a post-Civil War influx of southern blacks into its poorest side streets and alleys.
- **1854** Northern Liberties and Kensington were incorporated into the city of Philadelphia.
- **1850-1890** German Jews settled on Marshall Street, but by the time of the great Eastern European Jewish influx in the late 19th century, they had moved on to more affluent neighborhoods west of Broad and Girard.
- **1877** A Spanish-speaking local of the Cigar Makers International Union was formed signifying Philadelphia's important role in the late 19th century manufacture of tobacco products. The many cigar factories of Southwark and



North Philadelphia employed scores of Philadelphians, including the city's earliest Latino migrants. Workers from Cuba and Puerto Rico came to work in Philadelphia's tobacco industry well into the 1950s.

- **1885** Eastern European immigrants settled between Vine and Montgomery and from Broad to Frankford Avenue.
- **1890-1939** German Jews moved north towards Diamond Street and eventually to Logan and Olney, while more Russian and Polish immigrants who had initially settled in South Philadelphia made their way north along the Delaware, first to Port Richmond, and eventually settling in Northern Liberties. Orthodox Russians settled around 3rd and Fairmount and at 5th and Poplar; Poles settled along 2nd Street.
- **1893** The Lighthouse <http://www.philaplace.org/story/343/> settlement house was founded to provide a healthy and safe recreational space and to meet the social service needs of the local immigrant population. It continues to play a vital role in the community.

20TH–21ST CENTURY

- **1900-1940** Eastern European settlement continued to shape life in Northern Liberties. By 1920, a Hungarian enclave grew up around Mascher and Master Streets. By 1910, Philadelphia's small Slovakian community numbered 2,000. Dispersed all across the city, clustering according to regional affinities carried over from Europe, a few distinct Slovak enclaves emerged in Point Breeze (South Philadelphia), Nicetown (North Philadelphia) and in two neighborhoods of the Northern Liberties. Northern Liberties' Slovaks were primarily from western Slovakia (northern Hungary) and many practiced the wire-working craft near Girard Avenue. Ukrainian immigrants settled between 6th and 7th, just south of Girard Avenue. Albanians, who were a mix of Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Roman Catholics, settled in Kensington. Albanians immigrants founded the church of St. Peter and St. Paul at Hancock and Oxford Streets as well as a mosque at Girard and Hancock.



- **1920** Philadelphia was known as the “Workshop of the World” for its great diversity of industries, many of them located in Northern Liberties and Kensington.
- **1920-1960s**
 - Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants transformed Marshall Street into a major open-air marketplace and commercial center. The Marshall Street market <http://www.philaplace.org/story/201/> was a polyglot hub of commercial and community activity seven days a week; Jewish merchants sold produce, clothing, bread, and innumerable other goods to the neighborhood’s Germans, German Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, and Puerto Ricans who lived and worked nearby.
 - By 1920, the majority of the 5,000 Spanish speakers residing in the city lived and worked in the immigrant working-class neighborhoods of Southwark, Spring Garden, and Northern Liberties. Marshall Street from Spring Garden to Girard Avenue attracted many Spanish-speaking workers to nearby cigar and garment factories.
- **1930s-mid 1940s** African Americans migrated from the American south to northern cities, including “workshop of the world” Philadelphia, in pursuit of manufacturing jobs.
- **1947** “Operation Bootstrap,” a federal industrialization program, attracted Puerto Ricans to the continental United States and began the largest wave of Latino migration to Northern Liberties. Puerto Rican workers filled industrial, domestic service, and agricultural jobs.
- **1950s-1960s** Palestinian immigration began, and many Palestinians in Philadelphia (and New Jersey) are part of a large extended family, coming from the same West Bank village of Mukhmas, and settling in this neighborhood around North 2nd Street.
- **1958** Mayor Richardson Dilworth’s proposed urban-renewal plan signaled the beginning of the end of the Jewish business district along Marshall Street.



Though the plan to eliminate all pushcarts and storefronts and replace them with a “Marshall Street Mall” did not materialize, the threat of displacement led to widespread exodus. Additionally, consistent with post World War II settlement patterns, as families became more affluent, they relocated to less crowded areas in the Northeast and West Philadelphia.

- **1967** The I-95 corridor connecting the previously constructed southern and northern spurs separated Northern Liberties from other areas of Philadelphia and the Delaware River. It resulted in the creation of the “Forgotten Triangle,” a residential area isolated from the larger neighborhood.
- **1968-1985** Urban renewal efforts in North Philadelphia resulted in the displacement of Latinos. The Latino communities in Northern Liberties were pushed north of Girard Avenue into Kensington, where they clustered around 5th Street. Today, the neighborhood around 5th Street and Lehigh Avenue is the most identifiable Latino neighborhood in Philadelphia, although remnants of older Latino settlements in Spring Garden and Southwark remain. Located in the Fairhill neighborhood, *el Centro de Oro* <http://www.philaplace.org/story/329/> is the Latino commercial district centered around North 5th Street. The Golden Block’s many shops, restaurants, bakeries, and *botánicas* make it the “Main Street” of *el barrio*.
- **1971** The Stetson Hat Company <http://www.philaplace.org/story/326/> closed. At the height of production in the 1920s, Stetson employed over 5,000 workers and operated out of twenty-five buildings over nine acres of land near Germantown and Montgomery Avenues.
- **1987** The closing of Schmidt’s Brewery <http://www.philaplace.org/story/319/> at 2nd and Girard signaled the end of Philadelphia’s industrial era. Schmidt’s Brewery was founded by German immigrant Christian Schmidt in 1860 and remained in the Schmidt family until 1976. With the closing of Schmidt’s, Philadelphia was without a brewery for the first time in 300 years.
- **1991** Al-Aqsa Mosque <http://www.philaplace.org/story/310/> was founded in the former Dubin Company furniture warehouse on Germantown Avenue. Since its



foundings, Al-Aqsa has grown beyond the mosque to include a grocery and an elementary and high school that serve the neighborhood's close-knit Palestinian community and other Arab Muslims in the area.

- **1990s-present** Northern Liberties, Kensington, and Fishtown experienced a new phase of economic investment and development resulting in a rise in property values that threatened the working-class and older populations in the neighborhood with displacement. Once again, the landscape has been dramatically transformed as many of the industrial sites that for decades stood as visual reminders of the once vibrant industrial life that sustained this area were either razed or redeveloped into residential properties.