



Timeline: From Weccacoe to South Philadelphia

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

- **1638** The first Swedish colonists arrived at what is now Wilmington, Delaware, Small settlements of Europeans—mostly Dutch and English colonists—were already scattered throughout the Delaware Valley.
- **1642** The second group of Swedes established “New Sweden,” a colony made up of Swedish (and some Finnish) immigrants, in South Philadelphia at Weccacoe, named by the Lenni Lenape to mean “peaceful place.” The boundaries of “New Sweden” extended from the falls of the Delaware River at Trenton down to the mouth of the Delaware Bay.
- **1654** The Swedes and the Lenape signed a Friendship Compact at Tinicum, on the Delaware River southwest of Philadelphia. This compact reinforced the relatively peaceful trade relations that had developed between the two parties.
- **1650s** The Dutch briefly laid claim to the Weccacoe area before the British took control.



- **1677** The Swedes held the first Christian worship in a log blockhouse in Weccacoe along the Delaware River. Swedish settlers in Tinicum and present-day Delaware had to sail up the Delaware River every week to reach the log house “church.”
- **1682** William Penn established Philadelphia by negotiating a treaty with the Lenni Lenape. He renamed Weccacoe, calling it Southwark, after a town on the south banks of the Thames. The area was divided into two townships that retained Lenape names; the east side was named Passyunk, meaning “in the valley” and the west side was named Moyamensing, “pigeon droppings.”
- **1684** The ship *Isabella* arrived in Philadelphia with the first shipment of African slaves.
- **1700** Gloria Dei (Old Swedes) Church, <http://www.philaplace.org/story/1/> the oldest church in Pennsylvania, was dedicated on the site of the blockhouse that had been used as a house of worship by the settlers of New Sweden.
- **1740s** Southwark experienced a population and building boom as the area became home to mid-level artisans drawn there by maritime trades.
- **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.
- **1787** Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church <http://beta.philaplace.org/story/59/> was founded by Richard Allen and became a magnet for black settlement in the area around South and Lombard Streets from 5th to 7th, then known as the “Cedar Street Corridor.”
- **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.
- **1790s** Developing industries such as shipbuilding began to influence the use of urban space. By the 19th century, Philadelphia was the most important seaport on the American continent.



19TH CENTURY

- **1801** The United States Government established the Navy Yard at Federal Street along the Delaware River to build the U.S. naval fleet. The federal Navy Yard continued to build ships at this location until 1875. The Navy Yard then relocated to League Island at the foot of Broad Street, constructing ships until its closure in 1996. Today the 1,200-acre Navy Yard site has been redeveloped into a retail, business, and entertainment complex that houses over 80 companies.
- **1807-1815** Immigration from Europe, especially from Germany and Ireland, surged. African American migration from the South increased.
- **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** The area around Cedar (now South) Street contained nearly three-quarters of the city's African American population. The high concentration of white residents in center city pushed black residents to the periphery. Additionally, the location of free black churches (including Mother Bethel AME) in South Philadelphia affected patterns of African American settlement.
- **1838** Pennsylvania Hall was constructed at the corner of 6th and Haines Street as a meeting place for abolitionist groups to discuss and debate slavery. Three days after it opened, the building was attacked by an anti-abolition mob and burned to the ground.
- **1840s** Manufacturing expanded in South Philadelphia to include the production of inks, paints, dyes, and chemicals.
- **1840s-1870s** The Irish arrived in great numbers as a result of famine and settled heavily in Southwark and Kensington.
- **1841** The growth of the Irish Catholic community in Southwark led to the organization of a Catholic church in the neighborhood. On May 9, 1841, Bishop Francis Kenrick dedicated St. Philip Neri Church <http://www.philaplace.org/story/20/> at 2nd and Queen streets.



- **1842** The Lombard Street riots <http://www.philaplace.org/story/62/> began when more than 1,000 African Americans took part in a temperance parade to commemorate the 8th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the West Indies. An Irish mob attacked the marchers on 4th Street. Many black homes were looted and the Second African Presbyterian Church on Lombard Street was burned.
- **1842** The Institute for Colored Youth was established by a Quaker philanthropist at 915 Bainbridge Street in the heart of the Cedar Street Corridor. The prestigious Institute taught higher mathematics, classical languages, literature, and philosophy. The school moved to Chester County, PA in 1902 and eventually became Cheney University, making it the oldest historically black college in America.
- **1844** The Irish Catholic population was the target of nativist riots <http://www.philaplace.org/story/316/> in May in Northern Liberties. Violence was once again reignited in July outside of St. Philip Neri Church. Four days of rioting left 20 people dead and dozens wounded.
- **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.
- **1852** The first Italian national parish, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, was established in South Philadelphia by Bishop John Neumann.
- **1854** The Districts of Southwark, Moyamensing, Passyunk, Kensington, and Northern Liberties were incorporated into city of Philadelphia.



- **1871** The first professional, centralized Philadelphia Fire Department was organized and replaced the city's many volunteer fire companies that dated back to the 18th century. In the antebellum period, there were seven fire companies <http://www.philaplace.org/story/16/> in Southwark alone; the members of these volunteer brigades were drawn from and aligned with competing ethnic and political groups. Companies of Irish Democrats or Nativist Republicans often operated like street gangs competing for turf. The clubhouse atmosphere and ethnic and political antipathies often led to rival companies fighting at the scene of the blaze, causing more harm than good as the structures burned down around them.
- **1880s** The mass migration of Southern Italians began. The largest concentration was in the neighborhood now called Bella Vista, near the 9th Street Market; <http://www.philaplace.org/story/126/> the area from South Street to Washington Avenue, and the west side of 6th to 11th streets was largely Italian by the early 20th century. Until 1910, most of Philadelphia's Italian immigrants landed in New York City and then took the train to Philadelphia. It wasn't until direct steamship service from the Mediterranean began in 1909 that Italians began arriving at the Washington Avenue port <http://www.philaplace.org/story/190/>.
- **1880-1920** An influx of Eastern European immigrants, mostly Jewish, began to replace the long-settled African American population along Lombard and South Streets. Jewish immigrants settled along the commercial corridors just below South Street and along 4th Street. South 4th Street, known as "Fabric Row," <http://www.philaplace.org/story/89/> was the commercial hub for wholesale and retail men's apparel, serving Jewish and non-Jewish customers from all over Philadelphia and the world.
- **1887** Lebanese immigrants began settling around 10th and Ellsworth Street and established St. Maron's Church, <http://www.philaplace.org/story/182/> the first Maronite Catholic Church in the United States.
- **1889** The College Settlement House <http://www.philaplace.org/story/38/> was established to serve immigrants and children in South Philadelphia.



- **1890-1915** This marked the height of Polish immigration to South Philadelphia. Many Polish immigrants settled between Front and 2nd and Catharine and Christian Streets. In 1890, St. Stanislaus <http://www.philaplace.org/story/47/> was established at 2nd and Fitzwater and became the second Polish parish in Philadelphia after St. Laurentius in Fishtown.
- **1890-1910** A vibrant commercial corridor developed along 9th Street as Italian immigrants sold fruit, vegetables, and meats from carts and stands. Although it was once the social and commercial heart of the Italian community, and is still commonly referred as the “Italian Market,” the 9th Street Market was always an ethnic mix. For much of the 20th century, Jewish vendors sold fabrics and household items alongside the Italian-owned produce stands.
- **1895** Octavia Hill Association <http://www.philaplace.org/story/24/> was formed to facilitate housing reform. The Association purchased, renovated, and managed clean, safe housing for the growing poor black and immigrant populations.

20TH-21ST CENTURY

- **1950s** The city outlawed pushcarts, directly impacting commercial corridors such as South 4th Street and Marshall Street in Northern Liberties that had begun and operated as open-air markets lined with peddlers and vendors. Following World War II, many Jewish merchants who had once lived above their stores along South 4th Street, <http://www.philaplace.org/tags/284/> began relocating their residences to other neighborhoods in Northeast Philadelphia and the suburbs, and commuted to their stores downtown.
- **1967** More than 300 18th-century homes in South Philadelphia were destroyed and hundreds of families displaced along South Front Street during the construction of Interstate-95.
- **1975** The first Vietnamese immigrants and refugees arrived in Philadelphia and established businesses and community organizations along Washington Avenue and 8th Street, as well as businesses and stands in the 9th Street Market.



- **1980-1992** More Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees, including Cambodians, arrived in South Philadelphia and clustered around 7th and Wolf Streets in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood.
- **1996** Mexican immigration and settlement in South Philadelphia began. Today, Mexican businesses flourish along Washington Avenue, 8th Street, and in the 9th Street Market.
- **2000s** Immigrants, particularly from Mexico and Asia, continue to settle in South Philadelphia. Many neighborhoods have also seen an infusion of new families and young professionals, and the restaurants and shops that cater to them spring up alongside longtime mom-and-pop establishments. The rising real estate prices are pushing immigrants, renters, and other lower-income residents out of the neighborhoods closest to Center City (Bella Vista, Queen Village) and into the neighborhoods south of Washington and Snyder avenues.