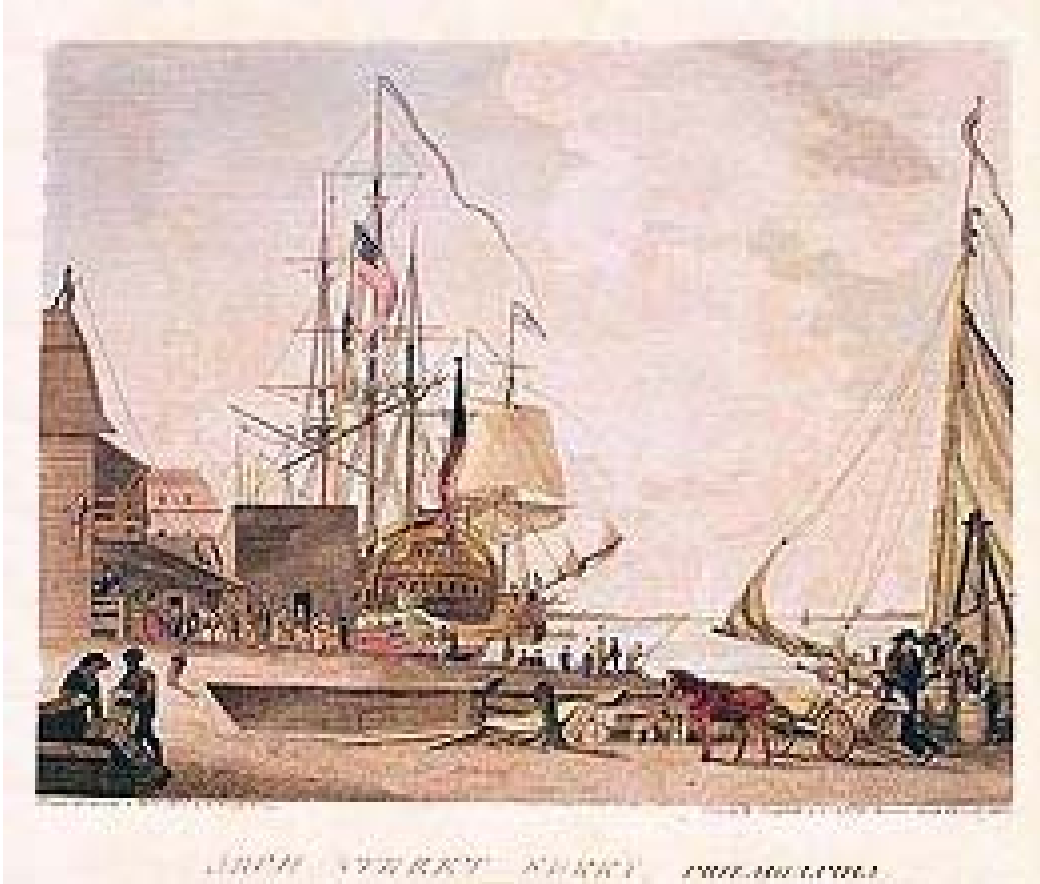


CENTRAL DELAWARE RIVERFRONT PLAN
WORKING PAPER
PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION



HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
FEBRUARY 2007

PCPC

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Cover: Plate from Birch's Views of Philadelphia - Arch Street Ferry, 1790

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Front and Market Streets – December 1915

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The history, economy, development, and, essentially, existence of the City of Philadelphia are inextricably tied to the Delaware River. The buildings, sites, and structures that reflect that 325-year history need to be recognized and preserved to offer a tangible reminder of the role played by the river.

Existing Conditions

Although the docks and piers along the waterfront have changed drastically throughout the history of Philadelphia, the adjoining neighborhoods retain much of their fabric and character. The historic view of the city from the river, despite the construction of Interstate 95, also remains intact. The central areas of the planning area, Old City and Society Hill, have been well documented for their historic resources, and each has been designated as historic districts by the Philadelphia Historical Commission. Other, scattered sites throughout the planning area also appear on the Philadelphia Register.

The National Park Service also has designated Old City and Society Hill as historic districts, as well as Queen Village, and a small section of Northern Liberties. A small section of Fishtown has been declared eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Several scattered sites appear on the National Register. See the final page for a map of historic districts and landmarks.

The neighborhoods at the north and south of the planning area have sites with potential architectural, archeological, historical and cultural significance; however, they have yet to be identified.

Opportunity and Constraints

The history of the waterfront and its adjacent neighborhoods has great significance not only to the story of Philadelphia, but also to the neighborhood identity of each area. Recognizing that history has been cited as a core value at each of the public sessions held in December 2006. Incorporating the historical and cultural resources into the waterfront plan will help educate the public about the area's history, preserve important historical and cultural sites, and add interest and dimension to the overall waterfront development.

Lack of research is the major impediment to the recognition of the historical and cultural resources. Surveys and other research must be done to target the historical resources, especially archeological sites, before major development takes place.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Systematic surveys of the neighborhoods adjoining the waterfront should be undertaken to target potential historical and cultural resources. This information should be archived with the Philadelphia Historical Commission. Formal designation as historic sites, by both the Philadelphia Historical Commission and the National Park Service, should take place to ensure the preservation of these important resources. Integration of the historic resources into the overall waterfront development plan will help ensure their future use and preservation.

BACKGROUND

To recognize and celebrate the history of the Delaware River and its role in shaping Philadelphia, it is important to know how it has changed over the years and the forces behind those changes.

Before King Charles II gave William Penn the charter for Philadelphia, the coastline of the Delaware River was already serving as a commercial port for the Native Americans in the area. A relatively smooth waterfront with many creeks and streams flowing to the river, the coastline offered little in the way of a harbor. Only the large Dock Creek, between what is now Walnut and Pine Streets, served as a haven for docked ships. In the mid-seventeenth century, several Swedes and other Europeans had created outposts along the Delaware, including James West who built a shipyard at the site of Vine and Water Streets.¹

William Penn, upon receiving the land charter to create his “holy experiment,” hired Thomas Holme to plot the streets and squares for Philadelphia. The 1683 plan became the basis of the city’s development, with Vine Street becoming the northern edge and Cedar Street (now South Street) defining the southern line. Penn envisioned the development of the city stretching the entire area between the two rivers, with commerce happening along both the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers, eventually meeting in the middle at Center Square.² Early settlement of Philadelphia was crude with many pioneers living in caves and log cabins along the riverfront. Within several years, the settlers began building brick houses in what is now Old City and Society Hill.³

By 1700, Philadelphia became the third-largest port on the Atlantic, after Boston and New Amsterdam (now New York), with a population of 2,000 to 2,500. However, development and commerce did not flourish on the Schuylkill River as planned. Instead, merchants and tradesmen began to spread development up and down the Delaware riverbanks, reaching beyond the official borders of Philadelphia. The large blocks envisioned by Penn became subdivided and crowded, with a network of alleys and streets bisecting Holme’s original layout.⁴

Commerce and various businesses thrived along the Delaware riverfront. At Walnut Street, Samuel Carpenter, a West India merchant, built the city’s first wharf in 1685. As a part of the approval for the wharf, William Penn’s Council required the construction of steps leading from the water’s edge to the top of the riverbank, as well as a 30-foot cartway along the bank.⁵ This design was repeated at other wharves and landings that began to spring up along the waterway, forming strong connections between docks at the water’s edge and the main level of the city. In 1684, the Council mandated public steps at every block to guarantee access to the Delaware River by the public.⁶ The only remaining set of these original steps can be found at Wood Street. Daniel Cooper established Cooper’s Ferry in 1695 as the first ferry business on the Delaware connecting Philadelphia to New Jersey.⁷ In time, several other ferry companies established landing docks as well. When Penn left Philadelphia for the last time in 1701, the waterfront had

¹ Carmen A. Weber and Richard Tyler, Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Penny Pot House and West Shipyard, 1987.

² John Andrew Gallery, *Philadelphia Architecture: A Guide to the City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1984), p. 11.

³ Mary Maples Dunn and Richard S. Dunn, “The Founding, 1681-1701” in Richard F. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia, A 300-Year History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Com., 1982), pp. 11-12.

⁴ Philadelphia Historical Commission, Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Old City Historic District, 2003, p.4.

⁵ Dunn and Dunn, “The Founding, 1681-1701,” in *Philadelphia, A 300-Year History*, pp. 2-16.

⁶ Philadelphia Historical Commission, Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places for the Wood Street Steps, 1986.

⁷ Philadelphia Historical Commission, Philadelphia Register Nomination Form for Old City District, p. 4.

numerous wharves and four shipbuilding yards. A market was settled along High Street (now Market Street) and the city catered to shopkeepers, craftsmen and merchants.⁸

By 1740, Philadelphia had a population of 10,000 and only Boston boasted of a larger volume of trade. Philadelphia became the port for immigrants from numerous European countries and the development of the waterfront continued with businesses, residents and other amenities occupying the area from the waterfront to 4th Street. By 1754, approximately twelve shipbuilding businesses stood between Vine Street and Washington Avenue. Public landings existed at major east-west streets and ferries traveled from Mulberry (now Arch) and High Streets. Between these, privately owned piers were built supporting businesses associated with the maritime activities, including blacksmiths, ropemakers, sailmakers and foundries.⁹ The harbor at Dock Creek that once offered safety to ships became too dirty and crowded to be serviceable and was infilled to allow for more wharf construction, as shown in the Clarkson-Biddle map of 1762. As the colonies entered the Revolution, Philadelphia stretched over a mile and a half along the waterfront and spread inland almost a half-mile to about 7th Street.¹⁰

Although Philadelphia businesses thrived in the wartime economy, the British occupation of the city during the Revolutionary War left Philadelphia even more crowded, dirty and in need of infrastructure investment. In 1790, the country's first census, the population blossomed to 53,000 and Philadelphia established itself as the country's largest city. Maritime activities continued to thrive along the Delaware River. J Drayton's map of 1830 shows piers stretching from Norris Street to the north down to Federal Street at the south. The U.S. Navy established a yard for shipbuilding and other activities in the area bounded by Federal Street, Franklin Street (now Tasker), Front Street and the river. All of this activity meant that the area along the waterfront became even more congested and several merchants began to discuss possible improvements along the Delaware. One proposal, offered by merchant Paul Beck in 1820, suggested that the City purchase all of the property along the Delaware River to create a new avenue along the riverbank. He hired William Strickland, an engineer and architect, to design the plan. In 1830, upon his death, merchant and financier Stephen Girard willed the City \$500,000 to create a new, wide street as suggested by Beck. The city implemented the idea and created Delaware Avenue.¹¹ The creation of the new street pushed the wharves and piers further into the river and facilitated even more growth.

As the mid-nineteenth century approached, Philadelphia lost much of its prominence in the new country. New York surpassed it in population and growth and Washington, D.C. became the country's capitol. As other ports became economic powerhouses, Philadelphia began to look to other areas for its economic growth, and factories and coal became the driving forces in Philadelphia's economics.¹² The manufacturing of all types of goods, from textiles to paper to machinery, became the lifeblood of Philadelphia's economy. As these new mills and factories sprouted in areas around the central city, outlying neighborhoods grew and prospered, especially Fishtown and Kensington.

⁸ Gallery, *Philadelphia Architecture*, p. 12.

⁹ Philadelphia Historical Commission, Philadelphia Register Nomination Form for Old City District, p. 7.

¹⁰ Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), p. 11.

¹¹ Philadelphia Historical Commission, Philadelphia Register Nomination Form for Old City District, p. 17.

¹² Gallery, *Philadelphia Architecture*, pp. 16-17.



128 North Delaware Avenue – May 1902

The year 1840 marked the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, and Philadelphia became its epicenter. The invention of the steam engine meant that factories no longer needed to be located on a stream or river and the newly formed railroad offered a faster mode of transportation for the manufactured goods. With the new mills and factories providing thousands of jobs, the population in Philadelphia and its surrounding territories grew rapidly, with a majority of the 250,000 people in 1840 living outside of Philadelphia proper.¹³ In 1854, the City of Philadelphia consolidated with the outlying neighborhoods and territories, creating the boundaries of Philadelphia today. Although now part of the Philadelphia, these areas retained much of their individual character and identities.

The Barnes atlas of 1857 shows the numerous ports along the Delaware River with several new railroad lines. One traveled along Prime Street (now Carpenter), dropping down to Washington Street (now Avenue) at 4th Street and leading to the waterfront just north of the Naval Base. A second line, the Pennsylvania Railroad, followed the crooked Willow Street, just north of Vine Street, meeting up with the Lehigh Coal Company wharf and then traveling north along Front Street to Germantown Avenue. Yet another track, a part of the Philadelphia-Trenton Railroad, curved north through Port Richmond, with a terminus just west of Frankford Avenue. These early railroad connections allowed goods manufactured in Philadelphia and coal mined in the hinterlands to be easily transported to other cities and countries. As support for this growing economy, the construction of banks, merchants' exchanges, and other ancillary businesses thrived in the neighborhoods along the riverfront. As industry continued to occupy areas along the waterfront, residents began to move to other parts of the city. In their place, warehouses, factories and distribution centers began to appear on the blocks closest to the river.

¹³ Gallery, *Philadelphia Architecture*, p. 42.

The steady growth of Philadelphia progressed. The industries thrived, especially during the Civil War as companies produced machinery, weapons and other necessary provisions. By the centennial celebration of the country's founding, the city's population reached 820,000 and Philadelphia became known as the "Workshop of the World."¹⁴ The port continued to grow as industry flourished in Philadelphia. By 1875, the area just north of Cumberland Street had a multi-pronged branch of railroad lines leading from the docks. The railroad line along Washington Avenue also sprouted several branches servicing docks in the southern portion of the city.¹⁵

With the construction of City Hall on the original Center Square in the late nineteenth century, white-collar businesses began to move westward. However, light manufacturing and wholesale businesses continued to occupy the areas closest to the Delaware River. By the turn of the twentieth century, the waterfront yet again needed upgrading to accommodate the growing port business. The railroads began to improve and enlarge their terminals and the City realized that it must also provide new amenities. The City created a port authority, the Department of Wharves, Docks, and Ferries, with the charge to build new municipal piers. The new piers were located near the existing railroad lines to facilitate transport.¹⁶ These steel and concrete piers featured architectural ornament and boasted of a fire-proof quality. By 1926, the Department had constructed twelve new piers and helped make Philadelphia one of the largest ports in the country. However, the ease of transport from ship to railroad eliminated the need for many of the industries in the neighborhoods along the water. As Philadelphia as a whole prospered, the areas closest to the river did not thrive, leaving only the small manufacturers and wholesalers.



Delaware Avenue – March 1899

¹⁴ Gallery, *Philadelphia Architecture*, pp.44-45.

¹⁵ G.M. Hopkins, "Outline and Index Map of Vol. 6 – Philadelphia", 1875.

¹⁶ Philadelphia Historical Commission, Philadelphia Register Nomination Form for Old City District, p. 26.

Industry continued to dominate the waterfront through the early twentieth century. The railroads sprawled from York Street north to Allegheny Avenue and at the south from Oregon Avenue south, with major lines connecting the various docks along the river. The Naval Base moved to the southern tip of the city with a freight yard occupying its earlier location. Docks at Lombard and Chestnut Streets housed ferries that carried passengers and cargo to the railroad lines in Camden, and a railroad bridge was built in Port Richmond, servicing the companies in New Jersey.¹⁷ The Philadelphia Electric Company built two massive stations, the Delaware Station in Fishtown and the Richmond Station in Port Richmond, in the 1920s.

The ports soon took advantage of the new technology of the automobile. The City built several new roads to accommodate the automobile specifically, such as the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the eastern portion of Spring Garden Street leading from Broad Street to the river. The construction of the Delaware River Bridge, renamed the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, in 1926 allowed the free flow of cars from New Jersey to Pennsylvania. The introduction of trucks allowed cargo to be transported to a wider range of locations without reliance on railroad lines. The ferry business quickly died and the stock market crash of 1929 further damaged the port industry.

The last major change to the Delaware Riverfront was the introduction of Interstate 95. Originally part of the federal Interstate Highway Act of 1956, the actual construction of the artery did not begin until the late 1960s and was finished in the 1970s. Although it allowed the easy transport of people and goods from the north to the south, the highway effectively cut off the Delaware River from the city, especially at Old City, Society Hill and Queen Village.¹⁸

As various industries moved to other cities or died out altogether, much of the waterfront between Allegheny Avenue and Oregon Avenue has become vacant land, though some of the properties at the center have been rehabilitated. The City creating Penn's Landing in the 1970s as a public venue, but much of it remains undeveloped. The Pier 3 and Pier 5 conversion to housing in the 1980s, and the construction of several hotels to accommodate the growing tourist industry, offer new uses along the once industrial riverbanks.

Major Issues

- What are the architectural, historical and cultural resources along the Delaware Riverfront?
- How can these resources be preserved and incorporated into future waterfront development?
- How can the public be educated about the history and culture of the waterfront and its adjacent neighborhoods?
- In what ways can the history and significance of the waterfront be conveyed to the public?
- What historic viewsheds of the city from the river should be preserved?

¹⁷ Map of "Upper Section of Delaware River between Pennsylvania Railroad Bridge and Poquessing Creek". c. 1930.

¹⁸ Philadelphia Historical Commission, Philadelphia Register Nomination Form for Old City District, p. 27.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The neighborhoods within the original boundaries of William Penn's Philadelphia have received the most scholarship and recognition by entities entrusted with the duty to preserve the city's historical resources. The Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) has researched and archived information for most of Center City and its records are open to the public.

In Center City, the PHC has officially designated Old City and Society Hill as historic districts. As documentation for these resources, the PHC has architectural summaries and general statements of significance for each neighborhood, and an architectural and historical summary of every individual property within each district. Other, scattered sites throughout the planning area also appear on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, with many concentrated in the Queen Village neighborhood. The quality and depth of research for each of these properties range from little to extensive.

In 1989, the PHC performed a survey of the Fishtown neighborhood to document the industrial sites of that area. However, the PHC has not undertaken any systematic surveys of the other neighborhoods within the planning area and the survey in Fishtown did not result in any major designation of sites as historic.

The archeological site of the Penny Pot House and West Shipyard on Christopher Columbus Boulevard at Callowhill Street has been recognized as a significant historical site by the PHC. Similar archeological sites such as this may exist along the waterfront, but research must be done to help identify them and a methodology needs to be created to ensure their preservation.

Some resources that pertain to the waterfront itself already appear on the Philadelphia Register. Piers 3, 5, 9, 11 and 12 all stand within the Old City Historic District, as does the site of the West Shipyard. Other piers appear to be eligible for the Register, such as Piers 38 South, 40 South, the Acme Pier, Pier 80 and Pier 82-84. These date to the major waterfront construction of the 1920s.

The National Park Service, through the National Register of Historic Places, has declared Old City, Society Hill, Queen Village and a small section of Northern Liberties as historic districts. These districts were designated at a time when extensive research was not necessary for a National Register application and the archives of the National Park Service does not have strong scholarship for these areas. A small section of Fishtown has been declared eligible for the National Register, but has not been formally listed. Several scattered sites throughout the planning area also appear on the National Register. The research for these sites is not extensive.

To comply with federal guidelines for historic properties, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) commissioned a survey of the Interstate 95 and Girard Avenue area in preparation of the expansion of I-95. Copies of this survey can be found in several archives, including PennDOT, the State Historic Preservation Office and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

All of the other neighborhoods within the planning area lack any systemic survey or scholarship. These neighborhoods appear relatively intact and their histories and building fabric point to a likelihood of the existence of historical and cultural resources. However, without any research, these resources remain unidentified and vulnerable to loss.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

In the community sessions held in December 2006, a consistent value cited by all three focus groups was history. The Delaware River has served as the life-blood of Philadelphia since its founding, providing jobs, goods and provisions, recreation opportunities, and a connection with nature. The different buildings and other cultural resources that remind people of these roles played by the river should be an integral part of the new waterfront plan.

The remaining historical and cultural resources can and should be incorporated into the plan, either with their historic uses or with new, adaptive uses. This layering of existing architecture with new design will add interest and depth to the overall development of the waterfront.

The history of the river can also unite the disparate pieces along the seven-mile stretch of the central waterfront. Incorporating stories of various companies that had docks, describing the architecture that once stood along the river's shore, and recalling the changes that have occurred at the waterfront can be done on interpretive signage to engage the users who will come to the river's edge.

To maximize these opportunities, much more research needs to occur. Although the neighborhoods of Society Hill, Old City, and to some extent, Fishtown, have been researched, little scholarship has been done concerning architectural history, waterfront development and maritime history in Philadelphia for the neighborhoods to the north and south within the planning area. A comprehensive survey should be done to ensure that all potential buildings and sites are recognized and documented, especially before any demolition occurs.

Another key constraint is the lack of knowledge of archeological sites. As the waterfront has been infilled over the centuries, some archeological sites may have been lost, but several areas may hold intact archeological resources that would be disturbed with new development. Again research must be done to identify these potential areas.

The preservation of the historic viewsheds of the city from the river also poses a problem. Neither the PHC nor National Park Service has the ability to officially recognize a viewshed as historic. The construction of Interstate 95 has impeded the view of the city from the river, but much of the historic neighborhoods are still highly visible. Several landmarks, such as Christ Church, Gloria Dei Church and the Sparks Shot Tower, remain beacons along the shoreline. The view of these historically important sights needs to be preserved.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

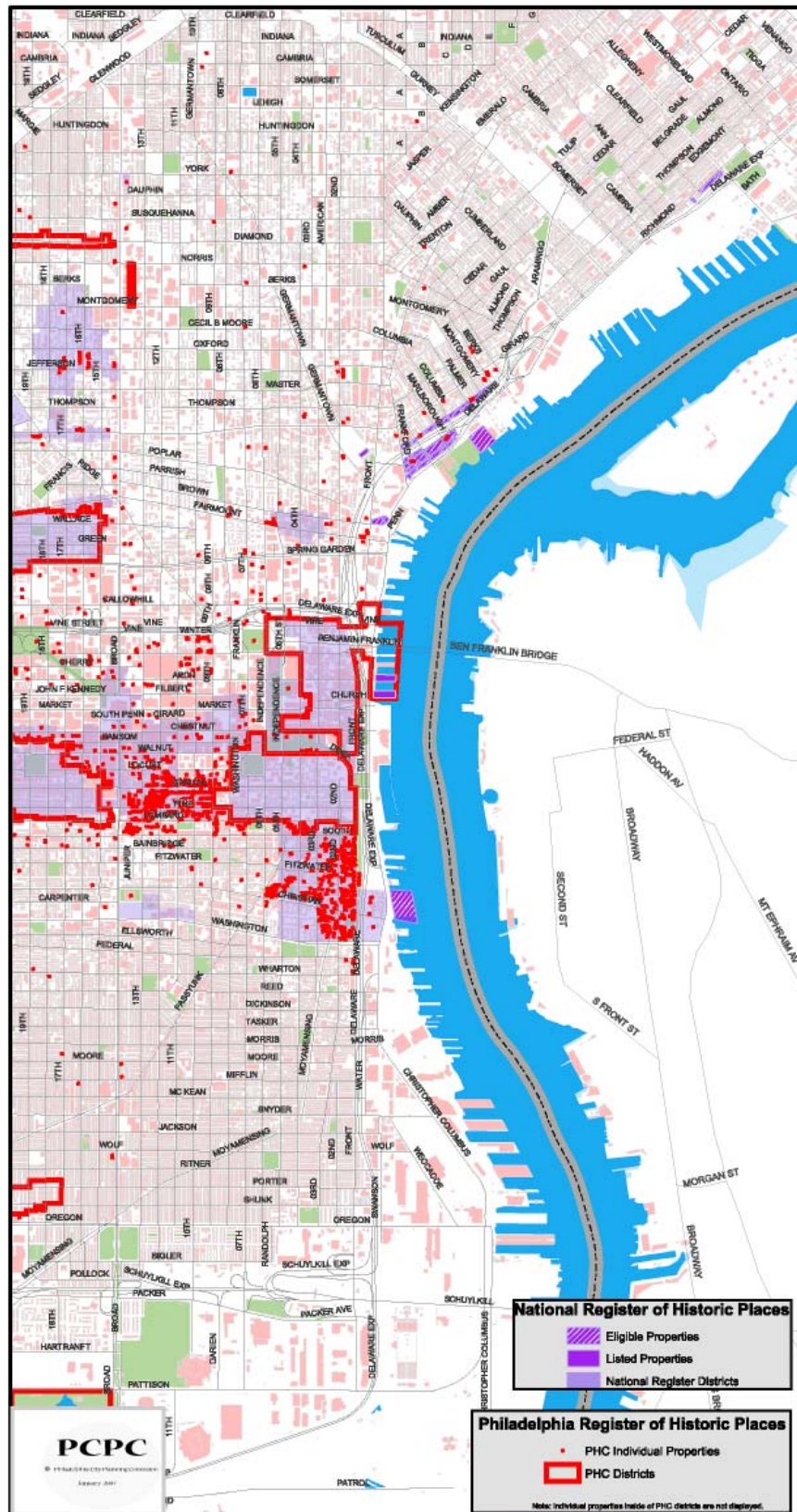
To ensure the documentation and preservation of the historically and culturally important sites within the planning area the following steps should be taken:

- Sponsor historical surveys in the neighborhoods of Port Richmond, Kensington, Fishtown, Queen Village, Pennsport and Whitman
- Have all research archived with the Philadelphia Historical Commission
- Nominate eligible resources to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places and for declaration of eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places
- Create a methodology to recognize and preserve archeological sites within the planning area
- Incorporate existing historical and cultural resources into the waterfront plan
- Use knowledge of neighborhood and port history to help interpret waterfront area with signage, exhibits and other communications



Delaware Avenue at Chestnut Street – April 1905

Central Delaware Riverfront Study: Historic Districts & Properties



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