

Structure and Surface – Notes from June 18th

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Industrialization in Philadelphia

William Penn's family was granted a gift of real estate in exchange for financing several wars, and he locates Philadelphia as a capital city for his colony.

Penn is a member of the Society of Friends, and he sees his land as a haven for fellow, persecuted Quakers.

Penn's plan for the city is a grid that goes from river to river and South Street to Vine Street. He includes four anchor parks, one in each quadrant, and many smaller parks. He had just experienced the great fire in London, so he wanted detached homes made of brick.

As it turned out, Philadelphia did not develop evenly from river to river, but rather emerged as dense clusters at the ports. It was an extremely bustling port town – second to London in the world. The wheat and grain from Pennsylvania support this industry. Philadelphia also becomes a center for arts, education, and culture.

Several small villages sprout up around Philadelphia, and remain separate until 1854 when they are annexed in the city proper.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Philadelphia goes into an economic tailspin because of the emergence of the wider and deeper port of New York City.

However, rather than become a ghost town, Philadelphia instead became the leading industrial city in the United States. It transitions from commercial to industrial.

No single person or industry was responsible for this transition, which makes it a hard story to tell. It was a unique kind of industrial base:

- Diversity of products – cotton and silk, hosiery, lace, hats, plain and tailored garments, shoes, tools, machines, saws, furniture, chemicals, drugs, jewelry, books, tiles, paints, dental instruments, shipbuilding, and much more.
- Diversity in work settings – every conceivable context became a locus of productivity, ranging from factories to craft shops to homes.
- Specialization in products and processes – Philadelphia focused on small batch production, niche offerings.
- Proliferation of small-to-medium size family owned and managed businesses (with partnerships) – not a corporate town (in 1880, the average manufacturing firm had eight employees).

- Reliance on skilled labor – because of the conditions detailed above, Philadelphia required a higher percentage of skilled laborers than any other industrial town in the United States.

There are speculative reasons for why Philadelphia emerged this way, including energy deficits (no powerful falls or rivers), long history of specialized artisans prior to industrialization (with large populations of German and British workers), recognition of profitability in niche markets, and investors who prefer railroads, canals, banking – not factory industries.

100% freeze of African American employment in the manufacturing industry, despite a comparatively large population of African Americans in Philadelphia.

Industry didn't happen randomly – it occurred in corridors, first in Northern Liberties and Kensington, then in lower Germantown and Nicetown, and then (more briefly) in the Art Museum area (unearthed during the City Beautiful Movement with the creation of the Boulevard). As employment declined, these corridors became abandoned areas.

Philadelphia Textile History: The Facets

- **Longevity:** started in the 17th century, still existent.
- **Diversity:** Work Settings, Products and Processes – as late as 1937, Philadelphia still has highly skilled home production, which feeds the larger mills.
- **Specialization:** Products and Processes – for example woolen horse blankets, broad silks, carpets, and, during World War I when there was no wool, William Scholes and Company began making rugs with paper yarn (a demonstration of nimble-ness and ingenuity), seamless and full fashion hosiery, felt for Stetson hats (in 1925, one in every four men in the US wore a Stetson Bowler). In 1910, there were 60,000 textile jobs (half were in Kensington).
- **Family-Owned and Operated:** Occasionally led to the end of companies when the last member of a family passed away (such as with Dobson Mills in East Falls).
- **Reliance on Skilled Labor**
- **Immigration:** In 1880, 75% of textile firms were owned by skilled, first generation immigrants. William Horstmann (jacquard and silk) and Sevil Schofield (and James Dobson) (cotton, and nimble responsiveness to war needs for woolen blankets) were significant figures.

- **Networks and Preservation of Knowledge:** Firms are constantly buying and selling from one another, sharing expertise, getting to know each other, deliberately attempting to preserve knowledge orally and through institutions. In the 1880s, the textile manufacturers decide to organize themselves into a trade organization. The Philadelphia Textile School was located in the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1884.
- **Fragility:** Family ownership as well as niche and seasonal market created fragility. Firms were very transitional – firms would rise and fall, quickly replaced. Additionally underemployment and unemployment was a fact of life for textile workers.

Scott Page: An Industrial Land & Market Strategy for the City of Philadelphia

Philadelphia is one of the few cities in the country with a study devoted to industrial land, including traditional and non-traditional industries.

Industrial policy objectives:

- Expand industrial economic activity in the city, encouraging a balanced and diverse city economy
- Increase the number and quality of jobs available to city residents
- Retain and optimize the use of the city's industrially zoned land
- Transition unsuitable industrially-zoned land to other uses
- Increase the city's revenues from industrial activity

But also to:

- Take stock of existing industry
- Broaden the definition of what constitutes industrial activity
- Raise awareness about the role of the city's industrial sector
- Change perceptions about industry, today and tomorrow

Many people have very specific, negative, and inaccurate perceptions about the state and impact of industry as a dead economy. In reality, there is still a lot happening, but it's often on a smaller scale. Industrial buildings are getting converted into condos *and* being used for craft and artisanal purposes.

76% of industrial land use is located in the Northeast, the Delaware River, and the Schuylkill.

Apparel has been identified as one of ten target clusters for growth (out of 56 total industries in Philadelphia).

Textile industries used to really be the fabric of the neighborhood, knitting together different kinds of production specialists.

Carla Bedner: Lace in Translation

The Design Center at Philadelphia University houses the textile collection, including the Quaker Lace Company, which was the inspiration for Lace in Translation.

Fabric of Philadelphia was an initiative to bring an interpretive lens to the city's textile history, which included several projects – two with Mural Arts: the Recycling Trucks, and a waterfall kimono-inspired mural in East Falls. Lace in Translation started with the challenge to drape the Schuylkill riverfront in lace. This didn't seem feasible, but doing something at the Center did. A series of designers worked with the Quaker Lace collection to create works of public art.

Artists and designers showcased in the film:

- 1) A welder who cut lace patterns into a 2,000 gallon oil barrel.
- 2) An artist who created large spans of lace out of raffia and rope.
- 3) A Dutch design studio that created a lace chain link fence.

Ken Finkle: Intersections of Creative Communities, Historic Communities, and Real Communities

Where is the past?

The past is still very present, especially in our infrastructure and we live with the attitudes shaped by perception of who we were (Quaker culture, for example).

The question isn't really where's the past, but where's *your* past. Even for a professional historian, there is a personal place.

There are many stories you can locate in the past:

Patriotic past: the maps and clothing of Lewis and Clark were produced here.

Spiritual past: Quakers ingrained values of the inner light captured through oral history, text, images, textile and apparel design.

Infrastructure past: empty and still functioning monoliths scattered across Philly's landscape, defining people's experience of the city.

Racial past: redlining that continues to inform the economic stability of neighborhoods

Artists as interpreters of the past:

Oldenburg's sketches for monuments, which included the possibility of a massive screw next to city hall. In the end, we got a clothespin. Most recently, Oldenburg has installed a large paintbrush next to the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts – could there have been a better interpretive project than this??

Group conversations to pose observations/questions:

- Idea of new growth, changing markets, rise of hand crafters providing new business.
- Role of the Internet in the industry (“My business has increased with the telegram, with the telephone, etc.”).
- Role of the Internet in our understanding of history, especially how it maps relationships.
- Return to organic.
- What is changing about the industry? What is new?
- Business started within and for a community, and then expanded through word of mouth – this was especially true for niche industries.
- There was at one time a swirl of information about job opportunities – this is less true now, and often is connected to the subterranean economy.
- Re-localization of labor for artists and retailers, due to the ease of oversight.
- Amy said she had better ideas when she walked in, the new information makes it fuzzy, but she looks forward to working out ideas with her manufacturing partner.
- Historic relationship between art and manufacturing – when were these activities fractured? The new word for it is design.
- There was a time when a family of modest resources would invest in a high quality product that could be passed from generation to generation – these were more like art, which was pretty interchangeable with the term craft. Mass items of less quality reduced the presence of craft, which simultaneously began to be viewed in a different light than art.
- A common thread: opportunity and eyes wide open, positive energy is untouchable.