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# WILMINGTON'S City Historic Districts



**James M. Baker, Mayor**  
City of Wilmington, Delaware

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**Old Town Hall, 504 Market Street, c. 1927;** Market Street City Historic District. *Courtesy of the Historical Society of Delaware.*

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## WILMINGTON'S CITY HISTORIC DISTRICTS

This brochure provides a summary of Wilmington's City Historic District program and the historic review procedures performed by the Design Review and Preservation Commission. The legislation establishing City Historic Districts and the related design standards are more fully described in the Wilmington City Code (*Sections 48-396 through 48-420*), available online at [www.ci.wilmington.de.us](http://www.ci.wilmington.de.us).

For printed copies of the regulations governing City Historic Districts or additional information, please call the Design Review and Preservation Commission Coordinator in the Department of Planning at (302) 576-3100.

## WHAT IS A CITY HISTORIC DISTRICT?

A City Historic District is an area that has been recognized for its outstanding historical, architectural or archaeological significance. Since 1975, twelve City Historic Districts have been designated as overlay zoning districts to recognize and protect the city's cultural resources. Within City Historic Districts all exterior changes to buildings or sites, including renovations, alterations, new construction, demolition and changes to the topography, are monitored through a design review process.

### Cover Photos:

(Top) **Delaware Avenue, view of Soldiers and Sailors Monument from Franklin Street;** Delaware Avenue City Historic District; *Wilmington Department of Planning postcard.*

(Lower Left) **The Rutledge Apartments, c. 1915 (formerly the Lyle Apartment Building),** 8th & West Streets, Quaker Hill City Historic District. *Courtesy of the Historical Society of Delaware.*

*All contemporary photographs provided by the City of Wilmington Department of Planning, Patricia A. Maley, AICP, and John P. Kurth, photographers, 2005.*

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## **HOW ARE CITY HISTORIC DISTRICTS DESIGNATED?**

From time to time, City Council may designate certain areas in the city as City Historic Districts and may define and amend their boundaries based on historic research performed by the Planning Department. Property owners are invited to attend neighborhood meetings and a series of public hearings regarding such proposals. The Design Review and Preservation Commission, the City Planning Commission and City Council vote on the legislation, officially designating an area as a City Historic District.



**1400 Block of Delaware Avenue, c. 1900**, view west from Broom Street; Delaware Avenue City Historic District. *Courtesy of the Historical Society of Delaware.*

## **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CITY HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION?**

City Historic District designation recognizes the historical significance of Wilmington's unique neighborhoods and cultural resources. Such designation helps increase property values by protecting the elements that define the area's character. Property owners within City Historic Districts may also be eligible for City tax abatements, Federal and State tax credits, and other limited funding programs.

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## **WHAT WORK ITEMS ARE REVIEWED?**

All proposals for exterior work on any elevation of any structure or site within a City Historic District must be reviewed and approved prior to initiating work. The Department of Licenses and Inspections will not issue a building permit until the design review process is complete. Property owners risk financial penalties and the removal of unauthorized work if changes are made without a building permit and design review approval.

Reviewable work activities include, but are not limited to the following items:

- Maintenance
- Renovation
- Alterations
- New Construction
- Demolition
- Changes in Topography

## **HOW IS THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS INITIATED?**

Upon application for a building permit from the Department of Licenses and Inspections, applicants within a City Historic District are referred to the Planning Department for review. The Design Review process is initiated when an applicant consults with the Design Review and Preservation Commission Coordinator and submits a fully completed application and support documentation.

Support documentation may include, but is not limited to, the following items:

- Completed building permit application;
- Completed Design Review application;
- Description of work;
- Available plans and specifications;
- Current photographs of the site.

Applicants initiate the Design Review process through the Design Review and Preservation Commission Coordinator in the Department of Planning at 576-3100.

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## **WHO PERFORMS DESIGN REVIEW?**

Work items that are considered ordinary repair or maintenance or that meet pre-established design criteria can be reviewed by the Planning staff. All other proposals must be referred to the Design Review and Preservation Commission for review. Upon application, the Planning Department staff will perform a preliminary review to determine whether a work proposal can be reviewed in-house by Planning Department staff or must be referred to the Design Review and Preservation Commission for review at their monthly meeting.

### **The Department of Planning**

Sec. 48-418 of the City Code allows for the expedited review of certain maintenance type proposals based on review by the Planning Department. These items include:

- Work that is considered in-kind repair or replacement of materials;
- Work that does not change the design, material type or outward appearance of a property;
- Work that meets pre-established design criteria approved by the Design Review and Preservation Commission.

Upon completion of the in-house review, the Planning Department will transmit a memo to Licenses and Inspections recommending approval of the proposed work and issuance of a building permit. Applicants are responsible for meeting all other Licenses and Inspections permit requirements prior to issuance of a permit.

Design Review and Preservation Commission meetings are generally held on the third Wednesday of each month. To be scheduled on the agenda, a fully completed application and support documentation must be accepted by the Planning Department by the first Wednesday of the month.

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## **The Design Review and Preservation Commission**

If the Planning Department determines that a work proposal is not considered ordinary repair or maintenance and does not meet pre-established design criteria, the proposal is referred to the Design Review and Preservation Commission for review at their monthly meeting.

The Design Review and Preservation Commission is a seven-member commission appointed by the Mayor, with backgrounds in architecture, planning, urban design, real estate, construction, environmental systems and the fine arts (*Sec. 2-66 through 2-69 of the Wilmington City Code*).

The Design Review and Preservation Commission generally meets on the third Wednesday of each month. To be scheduled for the agenda, a fully completed application and support documentation must be accepted by the Planning Department prior to the first Wednesday of the month.

The Planning Department prepares a brief analysis regarding the proposed project for review by the Commission members. Applicants or their agents must attend the Commission meeting to answer any questions about their proposal. Following review, the Commission recommends approval, conditional approval or denial of the application. They may also choose to table the application if further information is required.

The Commission's recommendation is forwarded to the Department of Licenses and Inspections within five working days, where building permits are issued. Applicants are responsible for meeting all other L&I permit requirements prior to issuance of a permit.

Proposals that are denied can be revised and re-submitted to the Commission at their next monthly meeting or appealed through the Commissioner of Licenses and Inspections (*Section 48-420 of the Wilmington City Code*).

## BAYNARD BOULEVARD

The Baynard Boulevard City Historic District consists of an eclectic mix of Victorian and Colonial Revival style homes primarily located along “the Boulevard,” a wide, tree-lined street constructed in 1906. It was renamed in 1925 after Samuel H. Baynard, president of the North Side Development Company. Late 19th-century rowhouses along the 1700 block of Washington Street complement the larger, early 20th-century homes and churches along Baynard Boulevard.



1800 block of Baynard Boulevard, c. 1921; Baynard Boulevard City Historic District. *Courtesy of Historical Society of Delaware.*



1914 Baynard Boulevard today; Baynard Boulevard City Historic District.



## COOL SPRING / TILTON PARK

The Cool Spring/Tilton Park City Historic District features a spectrum of late 19th- and early 20th-century residential architecture representing Queen Anne, Italianate, Colonial Revival and Second Empire styles. A significant portion of the district was developed between

1885 and 1900 on Caesar A. Rodney's 23-acre estate, known as "Cool Spring." The district is also significant due to the construction of the 37 million gallon Cool Spring Reservoir in the early 1870s, accompanying sanitary sewer innovations and the establishment of Tilton and Cool Spring Parks as urban amenities.



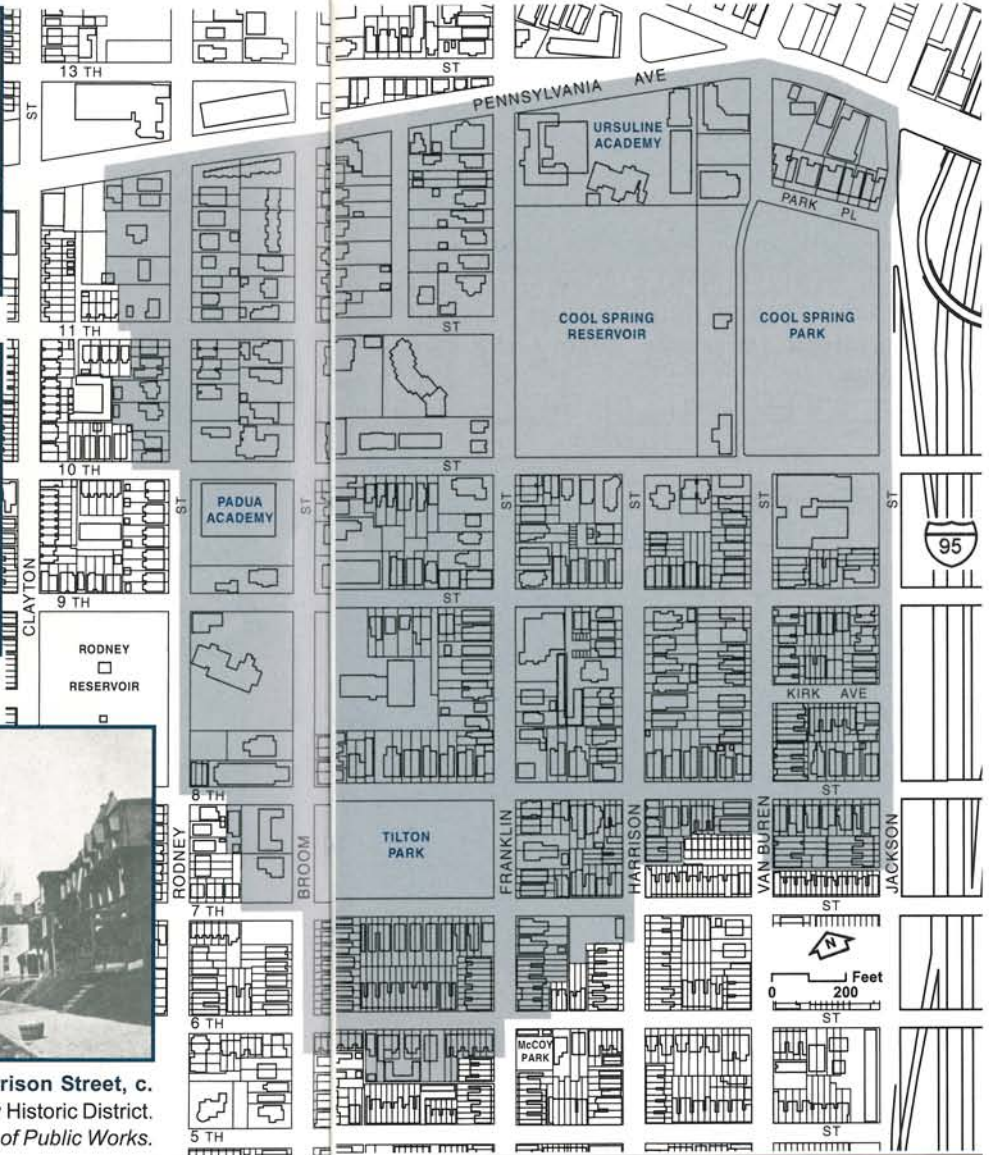
10th and Franklin Streets.



Cool Spring Pumping Station, c. 1907. Dept. of Public Works.



9th Street, view west from Harrison Street, c. 1905; Cool Spring/Tilton Park City Historic District. Courtesy of the Wilmington Dept. of Public Works.

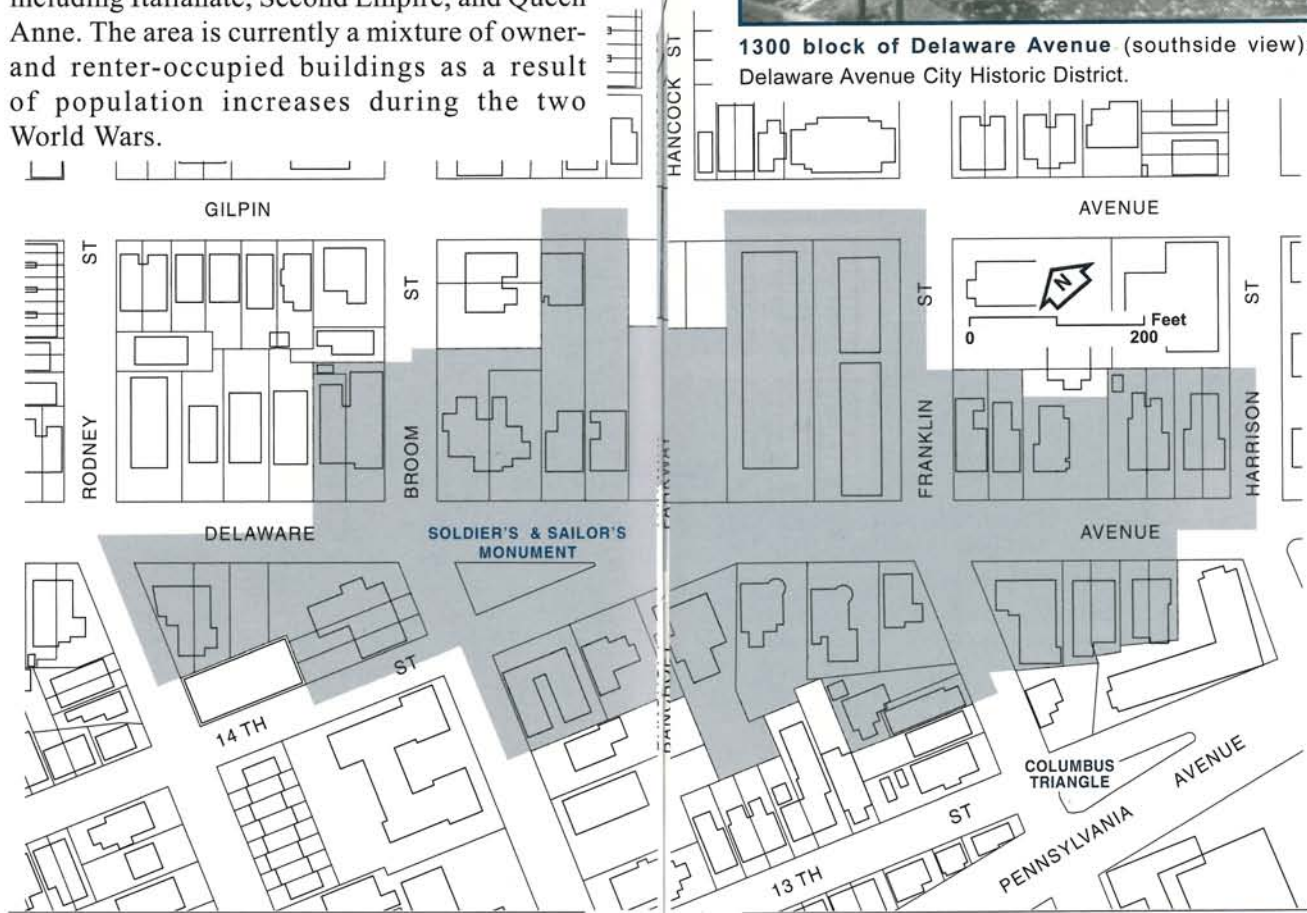


## DELAWARE AVENUE

The Delaware Avenue City Historic District began as an early suburb of Wilmington when Joshua T. Heald developed the first horse-drawn trolley line out of the City along Delaware Avenue in 1864. The horse barns and trolley depot were once located on the site of the Trolley Square shopping center. The Victorian houses in this district reflect the new wealth of entrepreneurs who benefitted from the industrial demands of the Civil War and post-war rebuilding. The resulting buildings are generally large and highly stylized, reflecting the major late 19th-century architectural fashions, including Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne. The area is currently a mixture of owner- and renter-occupied buildings as a result of population increases during the two World Wars.

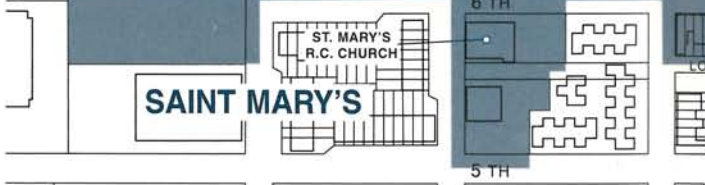
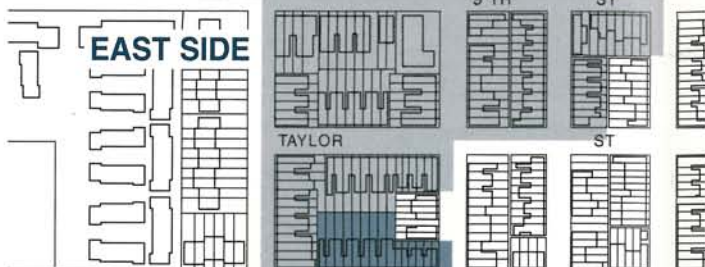
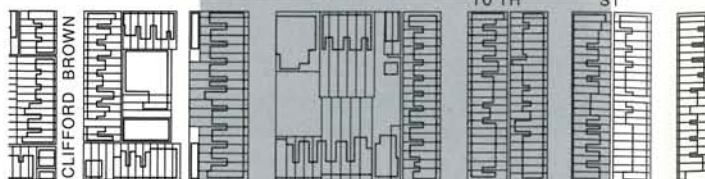
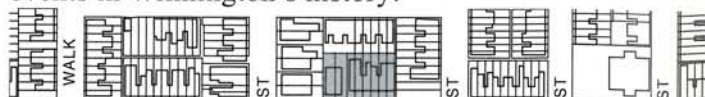


1300 block of Delaware Avenue (southside view); Delaware Avenue City Historic District.



## EAST SIDE, SAINT MARY'S and OLD SWEDES

The East Side, St. Mary's and Old Swedes City Historic Districts all feature brick row houses dating to Wilmington's period of intense industrial growth from 1830-1910. The districts also contain notable structures reflecting major events in Wilmington's history:



East Side homes on Taylor Street; East Side City Historic District.

The **East Side City Historic District** is a neighborhood of continuous brick row houses with corner commercial structures. The houses feature a variety of roof lines, window treatments, cornice trim and decorative porches.

The **Saint Mary's City Historic District** is named for Saint Mary's church and school, built in 1866 to address the needs of Irish immigrants and industrial workers of the mid-to-late 1800's.

The **Old Swedes City Historic District** is named for Old Swedes (Holy Trinity) Church, built in 1698 at Seventh and Church Streets. The district honors the location of Wilmington's first Swedish settlement in 1638, known as Christinaham.



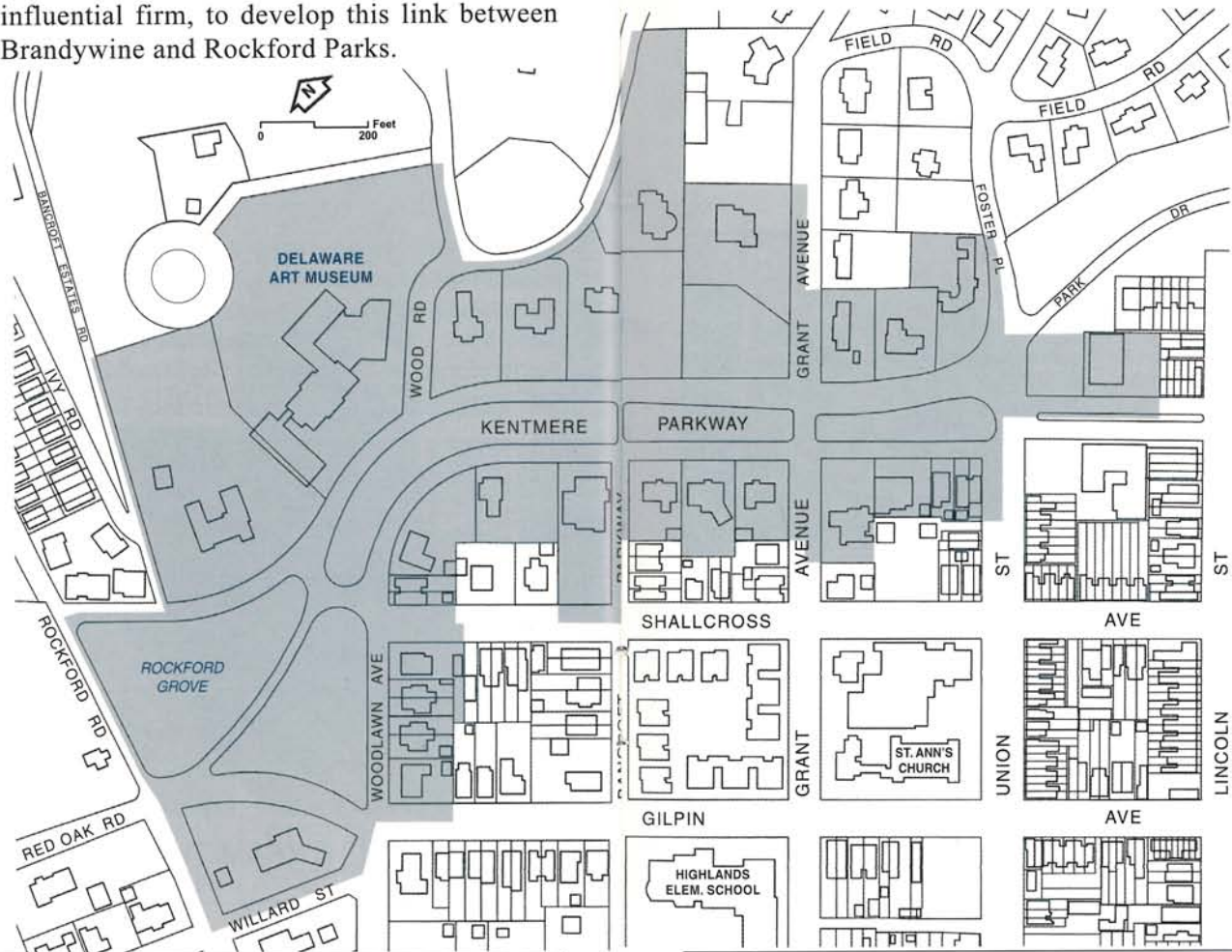


## KENTMERE PARKWAY

The Kentmere Parkway City Historic District includes a highly stylized mix of late 19th century and early 20th century homes built along a curvilinear parkway, which originated in 1885 as a 100-foot wide easement through the property of William and Jennie Field. In 1891, William P. Bancroft, industrialist, philanthropist and founding member of the City Parks Commission, collaborated with John C. Olmsted, nephew of famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and a member of the influential firm, to develop this link between Brandywine and Rockford Parks.



One Red Oak Road; Kentmere Parkway City Historic District.

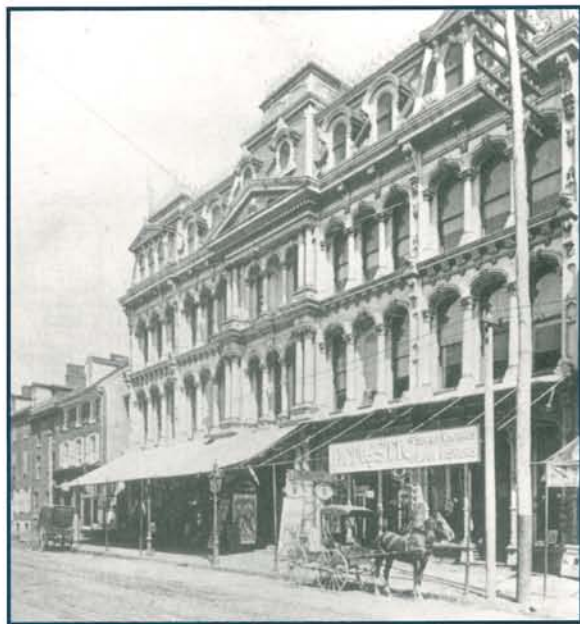


## MARKET STREET and LOWER MARKET STREET

The Market Street and Lower Market Street City Historic Districts contain a significant collection of commercial and public buildings reflecting Wilmington's growth from a mid 18th-century governmental and market center to a late 19th-century and early 20th-century commercial district. Millennium redevelopment activity between 2nd and 4th Streets combined



modern residential floorplans and ground floor retail uses and Market Street was reopened to two-way traffic.



The Grand Opera House, c. 1893, 808 Market Street, view north; Market Street City Historic District. *Courtesy Historical Society of Delaware.* (At Top) 300 Block of Market Street, Lower Market Street City Historic District.



## QUAKER HILL

The Quaker Hill City Historic District centers around the Quaker Friends Meeting House built in 1816 at Fourth and West Streets. The early Quaker settlement on this rise of land grew into a compact neighborhood of substantial three-story row houses. More elaborate, detached house were developed in the mid-19th century and several churches were built in response to the growing City population. The area is notable for its wide range of architectural styles, building materials, and varying degrees of ornamentation.



West Street, view south from 9th Street; Quaker Hill City Historic District. *Courtesy of Historical Society of Delaware.*



Thomas West Houses, 5th and West Streets today; Quaker Hill City Historic District.



## ROCKFORD PARK

The Rockford Park City Historic District includes houses along Red Oak and Willard Roads just below Rockford Park's southern border. Both the neighborhood and the park are a result of the vision of William Bancroft, the major proponent of Wilmington's park system. Land adjacent to Rockford Park extending southward was purchased by his Woodlawn Company, who installed utilities and then sold the parcels with deed restrictions for development based upon the then-popular "garden city" model communities. Affluent owners hired architects to design their houses in Colonial Revival, Shingle, Tudor, and other

styles from approximately 1905-1910. The setbacks and spacious lots further help to define the Rockford Park City Historic District.

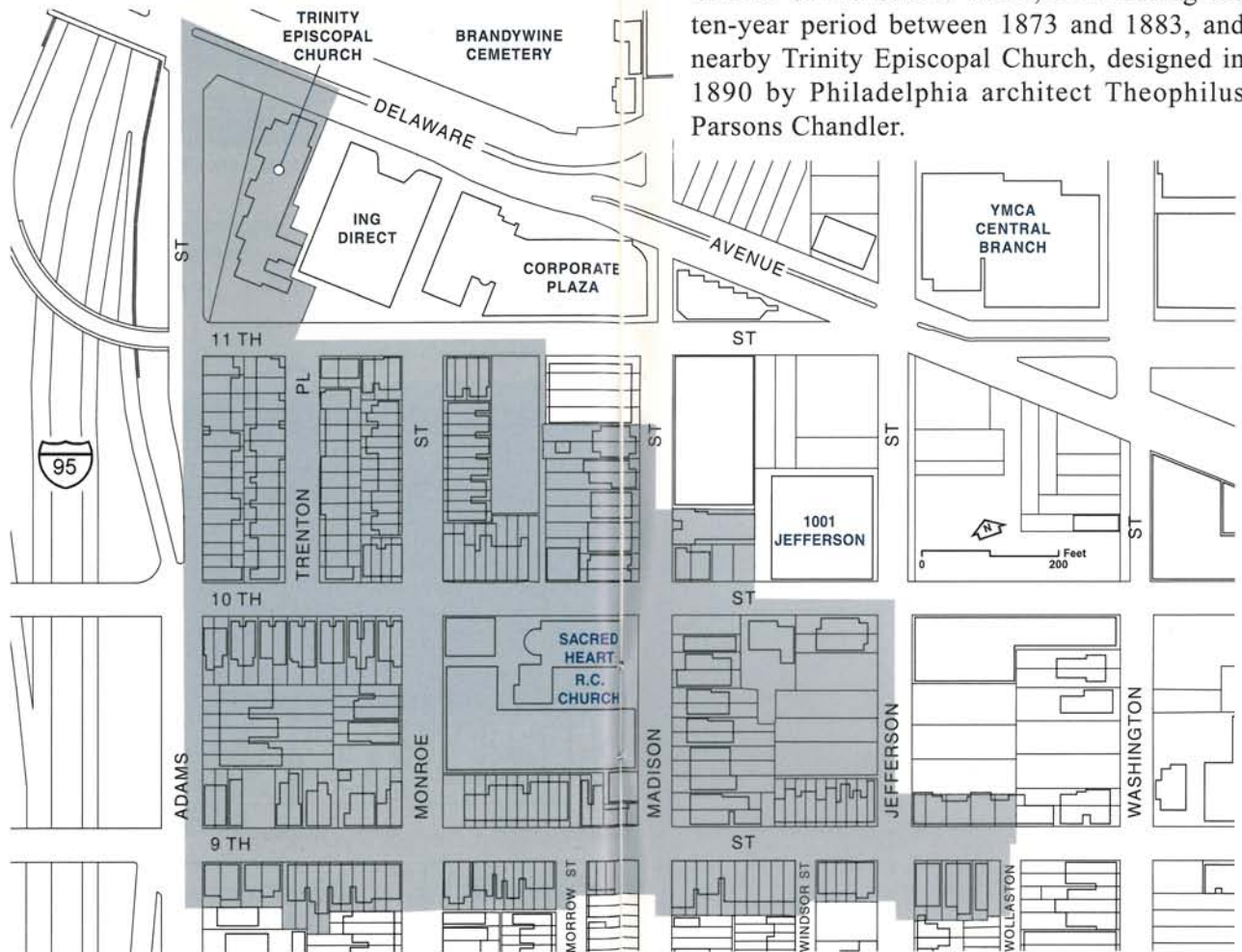


2401 Willard Street; Rockford Park City Historic District.





View east along 9th Street from Monroe Street; Trinity Vicinity City Historic District.



## TRINITY VICINITY

Designated in January 2003 as the twelfth City Historic District, Trinity Vicinity includes a mixture of row houses and semi-detached homes dating from the 1870s to the early part of the 20th century. The neighborhood was built over the top of Shipley Run, a stream enclosed as part of the City's early sanitary sewer system. Architectural styles in the district include Italianate, French Second Empire and Neo-Classical Revival. The district includes the Church of the Sacred Heart, built during the ten-year period between 1873 and 1883, and nearby Trinity Episcopal Church, designed in 1890 by Philadelphia architect Theophilus Parsons Chandler.

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Wilmington, Delaware 19801

**WILMINGTON CITY COUNCIL**

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*For information, please call the City Historic District Coordinator at (302) 576-3100.*