

## CHAPTER 2 – HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT & RESOURCES

Allentown's historical development is characterized in the City's physical growth and the types of buildings and landscapes that have evolved over time. Allentown grew outward from its cores in Center City and along the Lehigh River and Canal over distinct periods that are readily identifiable in historic maps and on the ground. The City's topography, river and stream corridors, industrial sites, and railroad corridors had marked impact upon that development. Chapter 2 provides a broad overview of the City's physical development as a basis for appreciation of the City's historic neighborhoods, corridors, and landscapes.

### HISTORICAL WRITINGS

Allentown is fortunate to have an excellent history of the City that provides a comprehensive review of its development. *Allentown 1762-1987, A 225-Year History* is produced in two volumes and fifteen chapters that divide the City's history into various periods and discusses political, social, economic, and physical aspects of the City's story for each period. The summary of Allentown's historical development has been drawn largely from this source.

*Allentown 1762-1987* was prepared by the Lehigh County Historical Society with contributions from twelve authors, each assigned separate chapters. The history was made possible by a grant from The Harry C. Trexler Trust. *Allentown 1762-1987* is an extremely important and accessible document that the City and its residents are fortunate to have.

A more recent publication is *Allentown*, an Images of America production from Acadia Publishing. Written by Ann Bartholomew and Carol M. Front, *Allentown* uses the Images of America format to present and discuss historic photographs that illustrate the City's places and people. The volume is a handy and useful supplement to the 1987 history.

There is a need to bring the City's history up to date. The period from 1987 to the present has seen dramatic change in both physical and social development. Losses in industry, manufacturing, and commercial retail businesses have forced

Allentown to reestablish its economic base, with several interesting stops and starts. The movement of ethnic white working class families to the suburbs and the influx of Latinx and other ethnic families into Center City neighborhoods have dramatically altered the City's social makeup and driven a variety of programs and initiatives. These stories need to be told while they are still fresh.

A number of articles in the Lehigh County Historical Society Proceedings written by Robert Whitman brought aspects of the City's story up to 1997. Since then, no new articles have been written, and the Proceedings ceased to be published in 2006. Additional articles or a synthesis of the past thirty years should be prepared.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.1:** Prepare an **update of Allentown's history** from 1987 to the present as a continuation of *Allentown 1762-1987*. Use articles prepared covering 1987 to 1997 and prepare new writings weaving them together and continuing the history to the present.

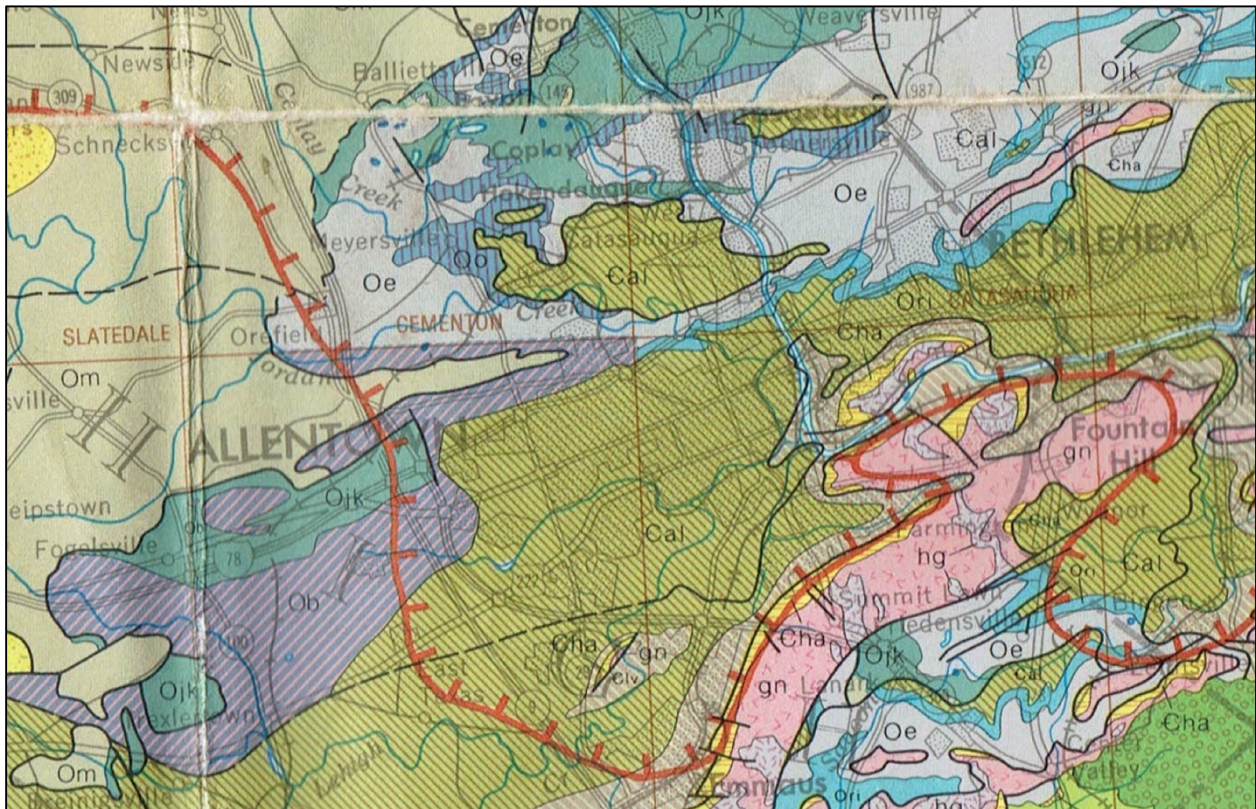


*Allentown in relationship to other cities in Southeastern Pennsylvania*

## LANDFORMS AND WATERWAYS

Allentown is located on the southern edge of the Lehigh Valley portion of Pennsylvania's Great Valley, just west of the Lehigh River. Allentown's Center Square is sited at a high point directly west of the river, with Hamilton Street following a long ridge sloping down to the river. The City is located on a relatively hard geological formation of dolomite called the Allentown Formation (Cal) which comprises the southern edge of the Valley. To the immediate north and west are the softer, lower lying limestone formations that provide excellent agricultural soils, and beyond those are the slates and shales of the Martinsburg Formation (Om) that are also predominately agricultural.

Allentown's location provided easy early access to these agricultural areas west of the Lehigh River. To the south of Allentown are the high granite hills of the Reading Prong, shown in pink in the map below.



*Detail, geology map of Pennsylvania – Allentown's Center Square is located just right of the center of the map in the green diagonally hashed area labeled "Cal." This green Cal area is of dolomite geology and is the south edge of the Lehigh Valley. The gray, tan, purple, and blue areas to the north are shales and sandstones and are the agricultural areas of the valley bottom. The pink area at the bottom right represents the granite hills of the Reading Prong. The Lehigh River flows south through the Valley and turns dramatically east when it hits the granite hills.*

The Lehigh River flows south through the Valley and turns dramatically east when it hits the granite hills of the Reading Prong. Allentown's location adjacent to the river's turn provided a strategic advantage for its mid-19<sup>th</sup> century growth due to the Lehigh Canal and to the railroads that were laid out along the river. At Allentown, the railroads diverged to serve areas of the Valley to the west and north.

In addition to its geological location and proximity to the Lehigh River, Allentown's growth was also shaped historically by the creeks that enter the river where it turns to the east. Little Lehigh Creek forms a deep valley to the immediate south of the historic 19<sup>th</sup> century center of the City. Hamilton Street essentially parallels the west to east flow of the creek on the ridge above it.

Little Lehigh Creek impeded the southern expansion of the City and its floodplain provided space for industrial sites accessible to the railroad. The City's early water system was located here, the site of which is now Fountain Park. Cedar Creek, a tributary flowing west from Little Lehigh Creek, in effect became the City's western boundary and is now also predominantly park land.

Jordan Creek flows into Little Lehigh Creek less than a half mile from the Lehigh River. Jordan Creek flows from the due north and creates a long, narrow peninsula between itself and the Lehigh River which became the City's 1<sup>st</sup> Ward/6<sup>th</sup> Ward, an area of the City with distinct identity due to its separation. The north-south valley of Jordan Creek provided a location for water powered mills that spurred early growth within their vicinity.

The Lehigh River is most notable for the canal, railroads, and adjacent industrial uses. A low floodplain borders the west bank of the river which provided space for early railroads and industrial uses. The river was dammed near the Hamilton Street bridge, the only crossing of the river, creating slack water north of it facilitating access by canal boats to slips along the west bank serving industrial sites. To the south of the dam, the canal follows the east and then north bank of the river.

As the Lehigh River strikes the granite hills of the Reading Prong and turns east, its valley narrows with high hills and steep slopes on both sides, able to accommodate only the canal on the north side and railroad lines on both sides – no industrial sites.

The limestone ridge on the north side of the river also borders it on the east side before the turn. This steep limestone ridge on the east side of the river prevented the location of industrial sites here but was quarried for limestone with limestone kilns that were served by the canal and railroad.

As a consequence of the geological formations along the east, north, and south banks of the river, only the Lehigh River's west bank is accessible to the City. Formerly important for its industrial sites, the west bank is now being developed for office, residential, and recreational uses.

## PENNSYLVANIA MARKET TOWN

In 1735, William Allen, merchant and entrepreneur in Philadelphia, purchased 5,000 acres near the Lehigh River including the tract on which he would eventually establish Allentown. By the 1760s, this portion of the Lehigh Valley had been settled sufficiently agriculturally to be in need of and to be able to support its own market town. At the time, no market towns existed within the region.

Responding to this opportunity, William Allen set aside a little over 700 acres from his holdings for the establishment of a town, which was named Northampton Town. The site lay in the wedge of land formed by the Little Lehigh and Jordan Creeks, west of the Lehigh River. The site was described as meadowland which the Indians had developed to encourage the proliferation of game. It lay along an east-west road that was surveyed in 1753 to connect the two new county seats of Easton and Reading. The new town site was accessible from farms and emerging villages throughout the valley west of the Lehigh River.

Town lots were surveyed in November 1761 and defined a 42-block area between present day Liberty and Union Streets (north-south) and 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Streets (east-west). The Town Square was laid out on a high point of land at the intersection of today's Hamilton and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets.

The purchase of lots and construction of dwellings began soon after survey. The first deeds were issued in 1765. Tax records indicate that 13 taxable properties were present in 1762, 27 in 1765, 63 in 1768, 47 in 1773, and 93 in 1779.

A tax survey in 1782 records that 59 houses had been constructed in the town by that time. By 1798, 88 houses were present, a 40% increase. Most of the houses were two stories high and constructed of stone, log, or a combination of the two. Two thirds of the dwellings had a separate stable on their properties. As a market town, Northampton provided services and locally produced products to farms in the surrounding countryside. Most craftsmen had their shops in their homes.

The most significant historic features remaining from this early period are the town's siting and gridded layout of streets. The center of today's Allentown remains the center of the original town as does the street network. Only three historic buildings survive from this early period: Trout Hall, the Bogert Homestead (Hunter's Cabin), and Stone and Log House. All three have been preserved and restored.

Trout Hall was constructed by William Allen's son and heir, James, in 1770 as a summer home and is located in today's Allen Park at Walnut and 4<sup>th</sup> Street. In 1848, the residence was purchased for use by the Allentown Seminary. The house became the north wing of a larger Seminary building constructed in 1851 and 1854. In 1868, the property became the original location of Muhlenberg College and remained in use by the College until 1904, when they relocated to their current campus in West Allentown. In 1908, the City purchased the

property, and Trout Hall was restored in 1916-17 by the Lehigh County Historical Society with the removal of the Seminary and College additions.

The Bogert Homestead (c. 1741) and Stone and Log House (C. 1775) are both located in the City's park along the Little Lehigh Creek. The Bogert Homestead was restored in 1938, and the Stone and Log House was restored in 1940.



*Trout Hall, the Bogert Homestead, and the Stone and Log House.*

Northampton Town grew slowly in its early years. In 1811, it was incorporated as a borough and in 1812, with the establishment of Lehigh County out of the western portion of Northampton County, it was designated as the county seat.

Through the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Borough of Northampton remained a small regional center, a typical Pennsylvania market town and center of government serving the surrounding agricultural community. In 1810, the Borough had 710 residents. By 1830, it had grown to 1,757 residents.

Like most rural market towns of the era, the Borough was dependent upon wagon transportation across narrow county roads, limiting its potential for growth. A chain bridge was constructed across the Lehigh River in 1812, 530 feet long by 32 feet wide, replacing the ferry that had operated there since about 1766 and greatly facilitating access to the east. The bridge served the community until 1841 when it was destroyed by a flood. A stone bridge was constructed across Cedar Creek in 1814 which remains today.

## **BEGINNINGS – TRANSPORTATION REVOLUTION**

Long term change came to Northampton Borough with the construction of the Lehigh Canal, whose primary purpose was the large scale shipment of coal from the developing coal region north of Blue Mountain to manufacturing centers such as Philadelphia and New York. The first, lower portion of the canal was constructed in two phases along the Lehigh River, linking Easton with Mauch Chunk. The first phase occurred in 1818-1820 and produced a one-way, downstream canal. The second phase occurred in 1827-1829 and created a two-way canal with a sophisticated set of locks and dams all along its route.

In addition to its primary purpose in transporting coal, the Lehigh Canal was a major force that transformed the use of land within the greater Lehigh Valley, particularly between 1830 and 1855. Surrounding farms benefited by being able to ship produce to urban markets such as Philadelphia by canal instead of by wagon. But also, during this period, entrepreneurs began exploiting the valley's

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rich mineral resources – iron, zinc, slate, and limestone – which could be accessed within the vicinity of the canal and shipped in large volume. The regional economy thus began a transformation from agriculture to mining and manufacturing, a transformation that accelerated over the decades.

In 1838, the Borough of Northampton was renamed Allentown.

With access to a variety of raw materials as well as to a source of power in coal, and with the ability to ship finished products to other markets via the canal, locations such as Allentown began to grow as places of manufacturing. The mining and processing of iron ore was of particular significance and became a driver of Allentown's economic growth. The first commercially profitable anthracite iron furnace was established along the river north of Allentown in 1841. The Allentown Iron Works was founded in 1846 on land along the river just east of the Borough and became a major factor in the local economy.

From Allentown east to Bethlehem and Easton, the Lehigh Canal borders the north bank of the Lehigh River. As the river turns northward toward the heart of the valley at Allentown, the canal continues to a point just above the bridge at Hamilton Street where a large dam was constructed. The dam created an area of slack water such that canal boats traveling north or south could leave the canal and enter the river. The area of slack water extended from the dam north to a point above today's American Parkway bridge at Kimmets Landing Park where the canal begins again. The location of the dam and the canal features remain today, mostly as City park land.



*The Lehigh Canal in Allentown's Canal Park on the east side of the river.*

Along the west bank of the river in the area of slack water, a river port was established that became Allentown's first manufacturing area. An 1842 map, prior to the establishment of the Iron Works, shows the river port as a series of slips providing access to warehouses and coal yards. The river port was a transfer point for goods from the surrounding countryside for shipment to

Philadelphia or New York. Lots were platted out on the land west of the port – today's 1<sup>st</sup> Ward – and named Lehigh Port, which was outside of the Borough limits.

Between 1835 and 1855, the amount of tonnage transported by the canal increased dramatically. The shipment of iron ore, for example, increased from 1,490 tons in 1835 to 70,737 tons in 1855. Similar increases were seen for the region's other raw materials, including limestone, lime, and slate.

In 1852, Allentown's eastern boundary was extended to the Lehigh River annexing Lehigh Port. In 1860, the area of the Allentown Iron Works to its north – today's 6<sup>th</sup> Ward – was annexed as well.

Railroads reached Allentown in the 1850s and accelerated the revolution in transportation that would transform Allentown into a manufacturing center. The Lehigh Valley Railroad was constructed in 1855 along the south and west banks of the Lehigh River connecting Easton to Mauch Chunk. The Lehigh Valley railroad served Allentown's river port and the Iron Works. The East Pennsylvania Railroad was constructed between 1857-1859 connecting Allentown to Reading. From the Lehigh River, the East Pennsylvania Railroad follows the valley of Trout Creek southwest toward Emmaus.

In the 1840s and 1850s, Allentown became a center for iron furnaces, most prominently the Allentown Iron Works but others as well. By 1860, twelve anthracite furnaces were operating within the area. Iron ore was mined from surrounding farms, particularly along the base of the granite hills of the Reading Prong to the south where the chemical processes necessary to produce the ore were most favorable. Coal provided the fuel necessary to run the furnaces.

Between 1850 and 1865, the iron furnaces were complemented by the establishment of rolling mills, machine shops, and other manufacturing enterprises. By 1860, Allentown had 57 diversified industrial and manufacturing businesses and was in the early stages of its development as a manufacturing center. Types of manufacturing enterprises varied broadly from home shops, to small buildings, to larger mills. The Allentown Iron Works was atypical in its size and sophistication, use of steam power, and complexity of operation; but it was a precursor of what was to come.

Between 1840 and 1860, Allentown's population grew from 2,493 to 8,025 persons, a three-fold increase. The shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy was accelerating. The Borough of Allentown had developed two separate economic centers. The original town at Center Square and along Hamilton Street was a center of banking, retail, and wholesale trade and was surrounded by residential housing. The Lehigh River was a center for iron furnaces, mills, the railroad, and some workers' housing.





Within these boundaries, the original town's street grid is established, with a new street grid added in the annexed area between Jordan Creek and the river. Beyond the grid, angled streets extend out into the countryside. The Fairgrounds, established in 1853, are located above Liberty Street beyond the Borough limits.

Along the river, the Lehigh Canal can be seen south of the dam near the Hamilton Street bridge and north at the location of today's Kimmets Landing Park, both providing access to the dammed water of the river port. The Lehigh Valley Railroad follows the south and west shoreline of the river, running adjacent to the river port.

The East Pennsylvania Railroad turns south from the river down the valley of Trout Creek connecting to Emmaus and Reading. The Allentown Railroad is shown extending west from the river down the valley of the Little Lehigh Creek and would have extended southwest into the countryside toward Reading but was never constructed.

Major industries include the Allentown Iron Works and Allentown Rolling Mill along the river. The slips of the river port are depicted with mills and warehouses in their vicinity. A limited number of planing, grist, woolen, and other mills and works are shown along Jordan and Little Lehigh Creeks. A tannery and mill are shown on the east side of the Hamilton Street bridge adjacent to the small village of "Bridgetown." The location of the Allentown Water Company is shown along the north side of the Little Lehigh Creek.

The 1862 plan shows relatively few buildings constructed in the fully platted area between Jordan Creek and the Lehigh River, mostly workers' housing apparently, with clusters in the vicinity of Hamilton Street and the the rolling mill.

The area of the original town is significantly developed, especially in the vicinity of Center Square and east-west along Hamilton Street. A significant number of buildings are constructed north-south along 7<sup>th</sup> Street as well, all the way north to the Borough limits at Liberty Street. The extent of Walnut Street one block south of Hamilton is more heavily built up than Linden Street one block north. Within the remaining blocks, a fair number of residences are constructed, but not densely.

It is not clear how many buildings remain from this period before and during the Civil War. Areas along Hamilton Street and the north-south blocks immediately adjacent have been redeveloped at least several times since this period. More of these early buildings likely remain on minor streets and alleyways than on the City's major streets. Their preservation was an impetus for the establishment of the Old Allentown Historic District in 1978.

While the dates of individual buildings have been researched by local historians and property owners, a comprehensive inventory of historic buildings within the area of the original town has not been undertaken and is recommended later in this plan. A particular focus should be the identification of buildings from the pre-Civil War period.



*Date plaque in Old Allentown*

*Wood framed residences dating to 1835 (top photo) and brick row homes typical of the 1850/1860 period (bottom photo) in Old Allentown*

## POST WAR GROWTH AND BUST

The iron industry that had begun to be a significant regional economic presence in the 1840s continued to expand in the decade following the Civil War, becoming Allentown's primary source of growth, prosperity, and wealth. The iron industry developed in the Lehigh Valley because of the availability of abundant raw materials in iron ore, limestone, and anthracite coal; presence of excellent transportation facilities in the canal and railroads; presence of a growing and capable labor force; and access to expanding national markets.

Allentown was reclassified as a city in 1867 as it continued to grow. The City's population grew to 13,884 by 1870, a 73% increase over the population recorded in 1860.

Through the late 1860s and early 1870s, new iron furnaces continued to be established in the Lehigh Valley and existing furnaces continued to expand. In the immediate vicinity of Allentown, the Lehigh Iron Company was established in 1868 and expanded in 1872 on the south shore at the bend in the Lehigh River. The company village of Aineyville was established beside it. Village houses remain along Constitution Drive in the City's 16<sup>th</sup> Ward. The Allentown Iron Company added a fifth stack in 1873.



***Workers' housing along Constitution Drive associated with the Allentown Iron Company***

Along with the iron works, the number of smaller firms producing finished iron products expanded in the City producing pipes, rails, water turbines, mining equipment, axles, car wheels, steam boilers, and steam engines. By the 1870 census, twenty-four firms were engaging in various forms of iron manufacturing, six in the production of pig iron, seven in forged and rolled products, and nine in casts. They employed 2,200 men, 60% of the City's manufacturing labor force.

Other types of manufacturing businesses expanded in Allentown as well. Shoe and boot manufacturing flourished in the City after the Civil War. Railroads continued to develop and consolidate, providing access to New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. The railroads enabled the large scale mining of slate within the valley's slate belt and the mining and production of cement in formations of high quality limestone.

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The 1876 maps of the City of Allentown on the following pages show the extent of new growth and development in considerable detail in comparison to the 1862 map presented earlier. Particularly notable are the expanded number of railroads, including the construction of the Lehigh and Susquehanna Railroad on the north and west banks of the river, completed in 1867. Additional, parallel tracks were laid along all the existing lines.

Sidings and spurs provided access to adjacent manufacturing facilities along the river. New industrial and manufacturing buildings were added. Existing facilities expanded as well. In addition to new construction along the west bank of the Lehigh River, the construction of new manufacturing facilities in the vicinity of Union Street between Jordan Creek and the river is notable. The Lehigh Iron Company on the south bank at the bend in the river, mentioned above, is shown on the 1876 maps. Limestone quarries and kilns are also shown serving the iron industry, located along the east bank of the river and south of the mouth of Little Lehigh Creek.

Within the City, formerly lightly developed blocks in the 1862 map are densely built up by 1876. Major new buildings included a courthouse, prison, schools, and churches, which figure prominently on the map due to their size. Along Hamilton Street, larger new commercial buildings were constructed, more densely packed for a greater number of blocks than in 1862.

The outer edges of the developing City extended farther in all directions. On the east side of the river, the village of East Allentown has expanded along with the size of the adjacent tannery. On the south side of Little Lehigh Creek, the area at the top of the ridge which would become South Allentown was platted but not yet constructed.

Allentown's period of post-war expansion came to a sudden halt in September, 1873 with the failure of major banks in New York and Philadelphia. The Panic of 1873 soon turned into a depression that lasted about five years. Businesses closed, and unemployment soared. Allentown's banks remained generally solvent until 1877, when three banks closed.

The major hit to Allentown was the decline of the iron industry that first became evident with the Panic. When the economic crisis first ensued, the City's iron works slowed or closed briefly due to the lack of availability of cash. But they soon resumed production, at least partially. But the longer term prospects were bleak, and Allentown's iron industry experienced a gradual and painful decline.

The decline was due, first, to the growth of major new competing iron producing centers, especially Pittsburgh, which used coke for fuel and shipped large quantities of high quality iron ore from the Lake Superior region. The Allentown area's sources of iron ore were limited and poor by comparison.

Second was the emergence of the steel industry, also in Pittsburgh, using the Bessemer process to produce steel and steel products that displaced the lower quality types of iron products manufactured in Allentown. The Bethlehem Iron Company invested in the Bessemer process, producing its first steel rails in 1873, but the writing was on the wall for the smaller, local iron works in the Allentown vicinity. The Allentown Iron Company, the City's economic driver in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, went out of business in the 1890s.



Matching sections of the map of the City of Allentown from the 1876 Atlas of Lehigh County by F.A. Davis. This map is an important resource in illustrating the nature and extent of the City's development by this period. The map shows the railroads, canal, and growing manufacturing sites that were fueling Allentown's economy.



*It shows the platting of streets and the expansion of residential development in detail. The map can be used to understand and draw conclusions about the City's physical development. It is also a resource to be used in the inventory of historic neighborhoods and identifying buildings from this era that still exist today.*

## REINVENTION – CENTER OF MANUFACTURE

With the decline of the iron industry, Allentown’s economic foundation for three decades, City leaders realized the danger of dependence upon a single industry. Out of the turbulence of the 1870s, a new economic strategy led to the beginnings of a new era that lasted almost a century.

A new generation of City leaders emerged, replacing the older generation of economic leadership that had held sway since the 1850s. The new strategy focused on diversification of the economic base by attracting a wider diversity of new industries, each on an individually smaller scale.

In 1881, the new leadership organized local financing to attract the Adeline Silk Mill to the City, the first of a number of silk mills that together became a major component of the new economy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1886, they attracted the Pioneer Mill and Iowa Barb Wire Company, which later grew into the American Steel and Wire Company. Other new businesses attracted included furniture factories, cigar manufacturing, and spinning mills. The City’s already successful shoe factories expanded as well.

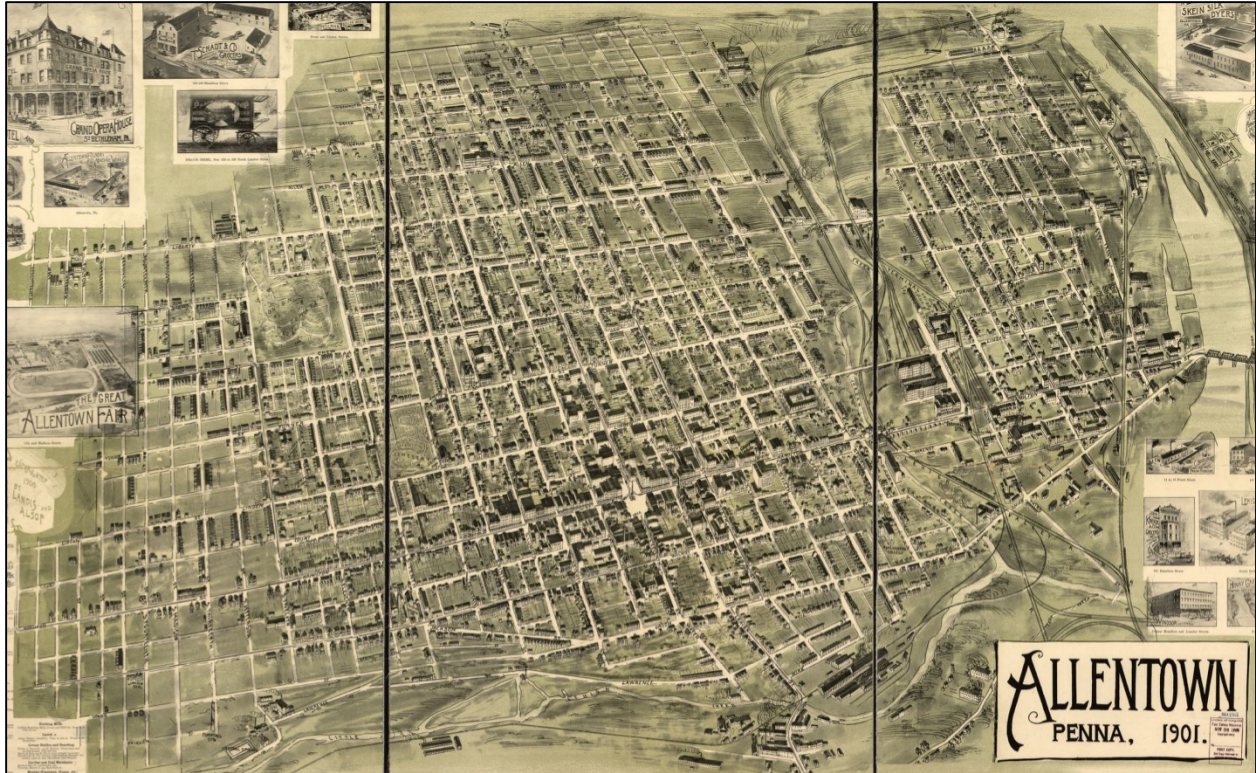
The new strategy was successful. By 1900, Allentown’s population had grown to 35,416 persons. Expansion of the City’s manufacturing activity had a positive impact on the City’s downtown retail and commercial center. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Allentown developed into a regional commercial center of larger and expanding retail stores. The City had two strong economic sectors upon which to depend — manufacturing and commerce.

As manufacturing expanded, new workers were attracted to the City and new housing was needed. Allentown continued to expand outward, especially to the west but also to the east and south. New construction appeared throughout the City providing work for building trades, planing and saw mills, and brickworks. Many new row houses were constructed along with stores, firehouse, schools, and other buildings.

Allentown’s most expansive period of growth occurred between 1900 and 1917, culminating in the era of World War I. In 1900, Allentown still had no paved streets; Hamilton Street at Center Square was paved in 1908. Forty miles of paved streets had been constructed by the end of 1916. Allentown was slow to expand its municipal infrastructure of water, sewer, and other services which were much in need by 1910, when the City was clearly becoming crowded. By 1917, the City had constructed thousands of new buildings, roads, bridges, and other infrastructure.

Allentown had implemented a horse drawn street railway system in 1867 that began to link outer reaches of the expanding City and make commuting to work possible. In 1891, an electric streetcar system was introduced, and it was substantially expanded in 1893. In 1905, the Lehigh Valley Transit Company was started and became a major influence within the City. 155 miles of track had been laid by 1915. The streetcar system facilitated the expansion of the City until it was overtaken by the automobile era.





*Bird's eye view of Allentown in 1901 – note the increased railroad and manufacturing development along the Jordan and Little Lehigh Creeks.*

Allentown implemented its first building code and inspection bill in 1908. The code mandated that no combustible material be used for wall sheathing. A fire zone was established in the City's business district west to 11<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets. No wood frame buildings were permitted.

Silk mills continued to be an important component of Allentown's economy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Twenty silk mills were in operation by 1917. The City also had ten shoe factories, seven furniture factories, and others.

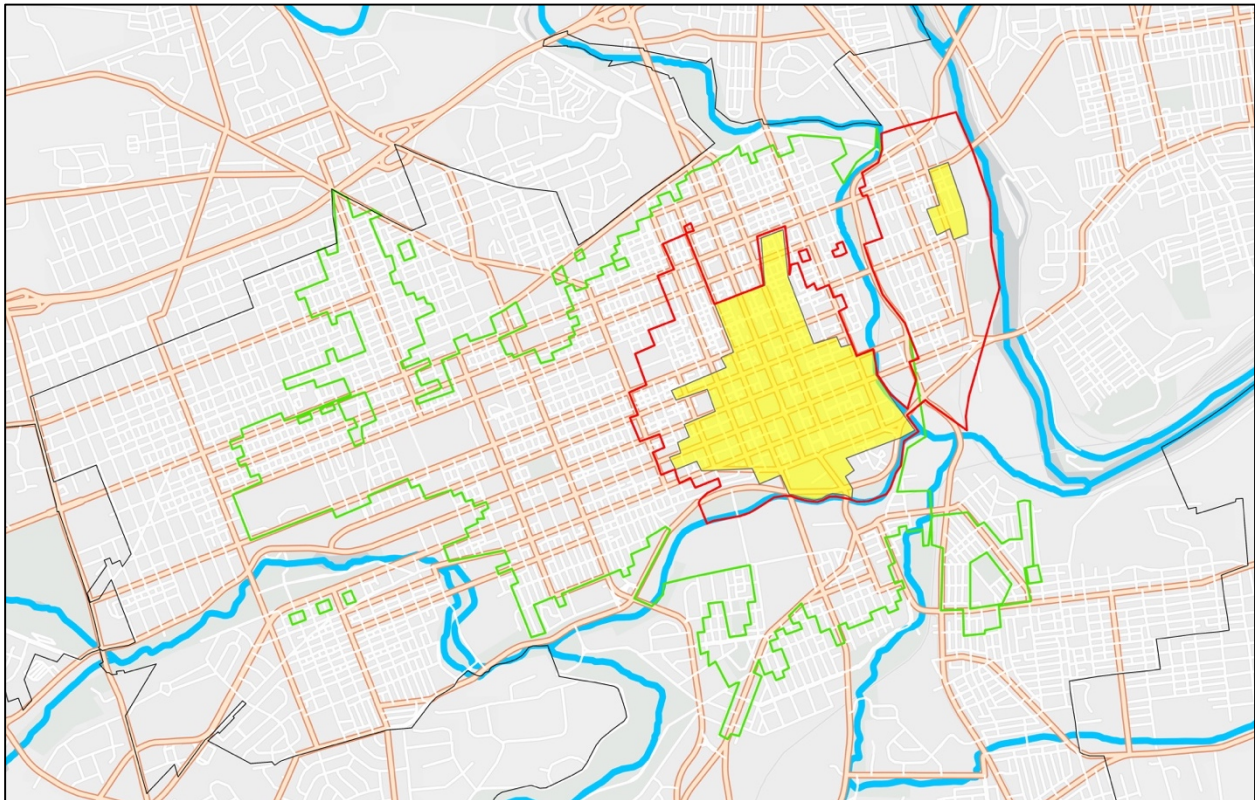
Two of Allentown's landmark businesses were founded in the early 1900s. The Traylor Engineering Company was established in 1902 to manufacture mining equipment and other products. The Mack Motor Company moved to the City in 1905 from Brooklyn. Both grew into major manufacturing entities for which Allentown became famous. Both established and expanded their facilities along the Little Lehigh Creek in South Allentown creating a new manufacturing area of the City leading to the growth of housing in South Allentown. The enormous 8<sup>th</sup> Street bridge was completed across the valley of the Little Lehigh Creek in 1913, linking Center City with South Allentown.

West Park was created in 1904 and completed in 1908 in the vicinity of 16<sup>th</sup> Street as an area of high end middle class housing. The 12<sup>th</sup> Ward of South Allentown in the vicinity of Lehigh Street was annexed into the City in 1907. The 14<sup>th</sup> Ward of East Allentown was annexed in 1911, expanding the City's boundaries east of the Lehigh River. Subsequent additional annexations took

place in the 1917-1920 timeframe, including the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward, the eastern portion of East Allentown, and 16<sup>th</sup> Ward, the eastern portion of South Allentown.

In West Allentown, the subdivision of Muhlenberg Manor between Greenwood Cemetery and Muhlenberg College was developed in 1917. College Heights in the vicinity of the College was developed and was annexed into the City in 1924. Hamilton Park (200 lots) and Greater Hamilton Park are located west of Cedar Creek. They were laid out and offered for sale in 1915 and were annexed into the City as the 18<sup>th</sup> Ward in 1930.

The City's biggest building boom occurred in 1916-1917. Over 750 buildings were constructed. Rows of new homes were developed in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Wards north of the original town. In Center City, merchants worked to improve infrastructure and appearance by moving overhead wires to rear alleyways, installing lights, removing street awnings, and removing projecting steps. The City established a municipal Planning Commission in 1915 to lead municipal planning and improvements. Allentown's population grew from 35,416 in 1900 to 73,502 in 1920, more than doubling its size.



***Growth of Allentown over seven decades – yellow shows the size of the City on the 1862 map; red shows the extent of the City on the 1876 map; green shows the size of the City on 1932 Sanborn maps. MAP BEING REVISED***

The set of 1932 Sanborn maps for Allentown show the extent of the City's growth at a critical point in its development. During the 1920s, growth was more limited than that which had occurred up to World War I but it was of similar character. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, little new private

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development occurred. After World War II, growth continued but was more suburban in character, much different than that from before the Depression.

The 1932 Sanborn maps, therefore, mark an important transition in the type of buildings that were being built. Most iconic in the 1900-1930 era of growth was the block-long construction of row houses constructed by developers. These blocks of row houses appeared throughout the City. They are characterized by brick exteriors, raised front porches, second floor window bays, and architectural flourishes. After 1930, these types of row houses were no longer constructed. For historic preservation purposes, the 1932 demarcation is an important turning point.



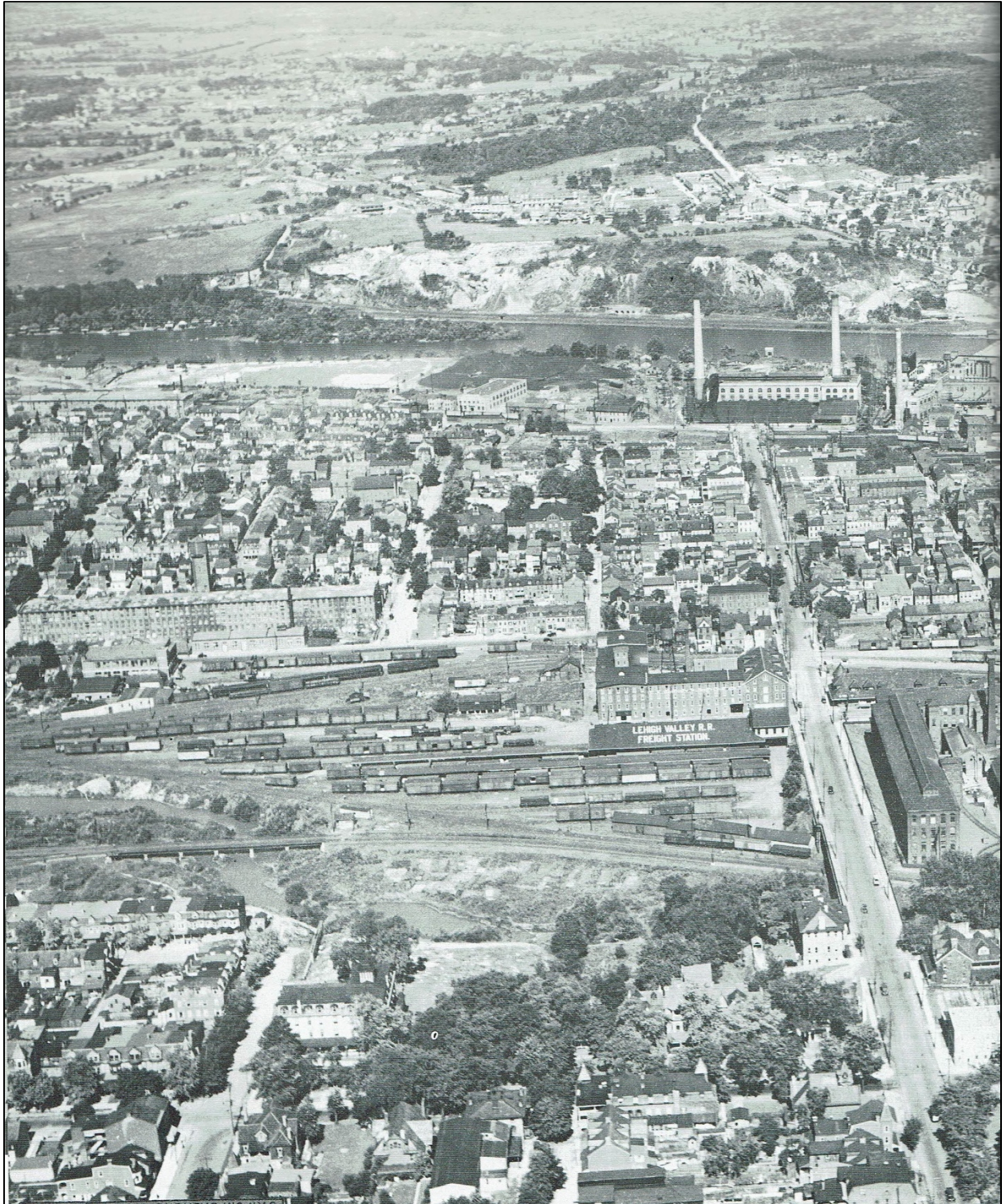
***1932 Sanborn map of South Allentown showing the International Motor Company (Mack Trucks) plant along the Little Lehigh River and blocks of row houses and twins constructed primarily for plant workers. The 8<sup>th</sup> Street bridge is at left.***



***The 8<sup>th</sup> Street bridge (left) and iconic early 20<sup>th</sup> century row houses in South Allentown (right)***



*Aerial photograph of South and West Allentown in 1925 looking to the west. At bottom is Traylor Engineering Company's manufacturing plant in South Allentown. Above the Little Lehigh Creek is the West Walnut Street neighborhood extending west to the vicinity of 18<sup>th</sup> Street and with largely undeveloped countryside beyond. Today this countryside is fully developed. (Allentown 1762-1987)*



*Aerial photograph of 1<sup>st</sup> Ward and East Allentown in 1925 looking to the east. At bottom right is the Linden Street bridge crossing Jordan Creek and adjacent railroad lines. Note the multiple mills. In the middle of the photo is fully developed 1<sup>st</sup> Ward with the Lehigh River beyond it. The top of the photo shows East Allentown only lightly developed by this date. Hanover Street winds through the countryside from right to left. A steep ridge with limestone quarries are visible on the east side of the river. (Allentown 1762-1987)*

## REINVENTION – LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY DECLINE AND EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY REDEVELOPMENT

Allentown's population had been growing at a rate of about 40% per year in the decades of 1880s through 1920s due to the City's manufacturing expansion and the resultant influx of new workers. During the 1920s, this rapid rate of population growth slowed to 25%, and during the Depression decade of the 1930s, it slowed to 4.7%.

During World War II, Allentown's industries were active in the war effort and expanded to meet the nation's needs. Several new residential neighborhoods were constructed specifically to meet the needs of new workers. Following the war, the City remained a vibrant economic center. Manufacturing boomed in the immediate post-war years, and the general prosperity extended into the 1960s even as dramatic demographic changes were occurring. Allentown's population grew by 10% in the 1940s and then leveled off, remaining steady at about 106,000 to 109,000 into the 1970s.

A well known example of Allentown's continued manufacturing prosperity following the war included the opening of the Western Electric plant on Union Boulevard in 1947 for the production of television tubes and then transistors in the early 1950s. This facility later became famous for its development of Blue Tooth technology in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Route 22 was constructed north of Allentown in 1951-1952 geographically becoming a northern boundary for the City's growth. The Route 309 bypass west and south of Allentown was completed in 1958 and opened up easy access to land for additional manufacturing facilities along Lehigh Street, facilitating expansion of South Allentown. Convair Field was constructed in 1943 in South Allentown as part of the federal government's significant wartime manufacturing effort in the City. In 1962, the airfield was expanded to become the Queen City Municipal Airport.

Mack Trucks, among the City's largest employers and by the 1950s inextricably intertwined with the City's identity, continued to produce in the 1940s and 1950s. In the late 1960s, the company was revitalized and recommitted itself to Allentown, expanding its large plant on South 12<sup>th</sup> Street and constructing its new World Headquarters near the plant in 1970. The City responded by building a new four-lane boulevard adjacent to the plant and headquarters connecting 8<sup>th</sup> Street in South Allentown with Emmaus Avenue, eventually naming it Mack Boulevard. Mack employed 4,000 people in the plant, and new housing was constructed throughout the immediate vicinity.

The construction of new housing in the post-war years included the infill of streets and blocks in East and West Allentown that had been platted in the 1920s but never built out. It also included the development of new residential suburbs around the City's edges of North, West, and South Allentown. In East and West Allentown, the new residential construction in previously platted but largely undeveloped blocks resulted in neighborhoods of homes of mixed periods. Homes built in the 1920s stood side by side with new homes

constructed in the 1950s and 1960s. Around the edges of pre-war neighborhoods, existing street grids were extended for the construction of new houses, often modern one-story brick ranch houses, a pattern that can be seen in North, South, East, and West Allentown.



***Post-war housing in South Allentown. At left, single family homes constructed on streets extended from adjacent historic neighborhoods. On right, multifamily homes off of Mack Boulevard.***

Unlike in the pre-war years, post-war development was predominantly automobile oriented. The City's last remaining street trolley ceased operation in 1951. Suburban townships around the City saw significant growth of both residential and commercial development in the post-war years, directly competing with the older pre-war City core.

Despite the optimism felt by the late 1960s' recommitment of Mack Trucks to Allentown, the decline of manufacturing and shift to service businesses prevalent throughout the Northeast began to be felt in the City and to impact its manufacturing sector. Allentown's industrial base began to be undermined as outdated plants and mills closed; companies merged, were bought out, and were relocated; and new modern manufacturing facilities were constructed outside of the City. The new highway network including Route 22, Route 309, and later Interstate 78 facilitated the regional transformation to a suburban based economy. New suburban industrial parks along the highways drew manufacturing businesses out of the City and attracted new businesses relocating to the area.

The Neuweiler Brewery closed in 1967 followed by Allentown Steam Heating and Power in 1967. Mack Truck, sold to a national conglomerate, closed its Manufacturing and Machine Shops 3 and 4 in 1985, and announced it was moving its entire Allentown operation to South Carolina in 1986. Other manufacturing plants closed as well. Over the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nearly half of Allentown's industrial jobs were lost.

As Allentown's manufacturing sector declined in the 1970s through the 1990s, its retail commercial sector struggled as well. New automobile oriented commercial construction in the surrounding suburbs began to compete with Allentown's downtown retail center.

Whitehall Mall, the region's first enclosed mall, opened along MacArthur Boulevard in Whitehall Township in 1967. In 1976, the Lehigh Valley Mall opened north of Route 22. Through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, new automobile oriented retail businesses were developed along all of the region's major suburban commercial connector roads.

Downtown Allentown's retail dominance declined. The City and its commercial businesses responded to the suburban competition in 1972-73 by creating Hamilton Mall, redesigning Hamilton Street to make it pedestrian friendly and constructing glass-topped covered walks. Large areas of blocks adjacent to Hamilton Mall were torn down for parking. Despite the impressive effort, it was ultimately not successful. Well known prominent stores began to close and be replaced with stores whose customers were less affluent. Two of the City's major department stores closed by 1990. Allentown's flagship Hess's Department Store was sold in 1994 and closed in 1996.

Demographic changes occurred in downtown neighborhoods during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as well, as City leaders focused on saving the Hamilton Street commercial corridor. Working families that had been employed in surrounding manufacturing facilities moved out of the City to more spacious suburban neighborhoods as the City's manufacturing declined. Row homes in Center City neighborhoods sold cheaply, often to speculators and landlords who converted them to low rent apartments. Homeownership and resultant investment and commitment to the neighborhoods declined, particularly in the small row home neighborhoods of Old Allentown, Jordan Heights, and 1<sup>st</sup> Ward/6<sup>th</sup> Ward.

New Latinx residents were attracted to the City from New York, Philadelphia, and Puerto Rico by the availability of housing and the low rents. Over the three decades of the 1970s through the 1990s, the demographics of the Center City residential neighborhoods were transformed. In a sense, these new residents saved these neighborhoods simply by occupying them and through their vibrant cultural expression. Allentown's Latinx population has become a cultural fixture of the City and remains concentrated in the Center City neighborhoods.

Allentown's efforts at revitalization continued into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Allentown Economic Development Corporation successfully redeveloped abandoned manufacturing facilities such as the Mack Trucks Plant 4A in 1989 and Plant 4 in 1994. Efforts gathered momentum in the early 2000s in Center City with the rehabilitation of the Donley Center in 1997, the former headquarters of Lehigh Cement; the redevelopment of PPL Plaza in 2003 with a new eight story office building on the site of the former Hess's Department Store; and redevelopment of the Butz Corporate Center in 2006 on the 900 block of Hamilton Street.

Center City's continued transformation, however, was facilitated with the establishment of the state legislated Neighborhood Investment Zone (NIZ) in 2009. Successfully passed through the legislature by State Senator Pat Browne, the NIZ provides significant tax incentives for businesses developing large scale projects and relocating in Center City. The original legislation was tailored only to Allentown but has since been adapted by the state for application to other urban centers.





*Portion of the repurposed Mack Truck plant in South Allentown*

Since establishment of the NIZ, a number of significant new large scale redevelopment projects have been completed, transforming and revitalizing Center City Allentown. Projects included construction of the PPL Center in 2014 at Center Square. The NIZ also applies to the redevelopment of the Lehigh River waterfront area in the vicinity of the former Allentown Rolling Mills. The redevelopment of both Center City and the waterfront symbolize the transformation of the City's economic base from retail commercial and manufacturing to a large scale business center. This redevelopment also includes a significant residential component, drawing new residents back into the City's urban center.

Allentown's ongoing 21<sup>st</sup> century transformation is discussed further in subsequent chapters of this Historic Preservation Plan.

## **CONCLUSION – GENERAL HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

A number of broad patterns are evident in Allentown's historical development that are important in identifying strategies for this Historic Preservation Plan. Allentown **grew outward** from its cores in the original town (Center City) and along the Lehigh River over distinct periods that are readily identifiable in historic maps. The City's topography, river and stream corridors, industrial sites, and railroad corridors had marked impact upon where and how development happened.

Center City, especially Hamilton Street and adjacent streets, and the City's industrial sites saw a significant amount of **redevelopment during different periods**, with new commercial, residential, and industrial structures replacing earlier ones in response to economic dynamics. This pattern has been replicated by the City's recent 21<sup>st</sup> century resurgence and redevelopment.

Outer neighborhoods – post 1876 – have been **mostly additive** in their growth and development, without significant redevelopment except in former industrial areas adjacent to railroads. Significant growth occurred in the first two decades 20<sup>th</sup> century with specific building types that are characteristic of that period.

By the early 1930s, the City as we know it today had been almost entirely platted with streets and blocks even though new construction along those streets and within those blocks would take decades to fill in – into the 1950s and 1960s. Consequently, outer neighborhoods have a **diversity of housing from different periods** existing side by side.

Most development in residential neighborhoods from all periods was in the form of **single-family residences**.

In general, Allentown's neighborhoods have **very good building stock and a high degree of historic integrity**. Center City neighborhoods are known for their 19<sup>th</sup> century brick row houses. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhoods are known for their blocks of brick row homes constructed by developers and featuring raised front porches and second story bays. After 1908 and the adoption of a Citywide building code, wood construction was prohibited and residential construction using brick or other form of masonry was required. Allentown's residential neighborhoods from all periods are **intact and livable**.

Larger **landmark buildings** such as schools, churches, commercial structures, and other building types provided historic focal points for neighborhoods. They stand out in historic photos due to their size. Most neighborhoods are also associated with **historic community parks and cemeteries**.

Many of Allentown's former **industrial sites and railroad corridors** have been redeveloped and repurposed, often as parks and open space but also as sites for potential new development. Only a few historic industrial and manufacturing buildings remain. Among these are a number of **historic mills** bordering river corridors and adjacent to residential neighborhoods. Many of these have survived and been adaptively reused as apartments. Federal rehabilitation tax credits have not been used in their rehabilitation, and the treatment and quality of their rehabilitation work is mixed.

The most significant issue in Allentown's historic neighborhoods is **inappropriate treatments** – the covering and/or removal of historic building fabric. The use of brick-face, stone-face, stucco, and aluminum siding is particularly prevalent. The replacement of historic porch features has also been common. Groups of row homes that once had consistency are now often in contrast with each other. Much of this change has occurred in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century through a desire of owners to update and refresh the appearance of their historic homes. In some cases, exterior insulation may have been installed to improve the building's thermal performance. Brick-face, stone-face, and stucco have been especially damaging to underlying historic building fabric.