

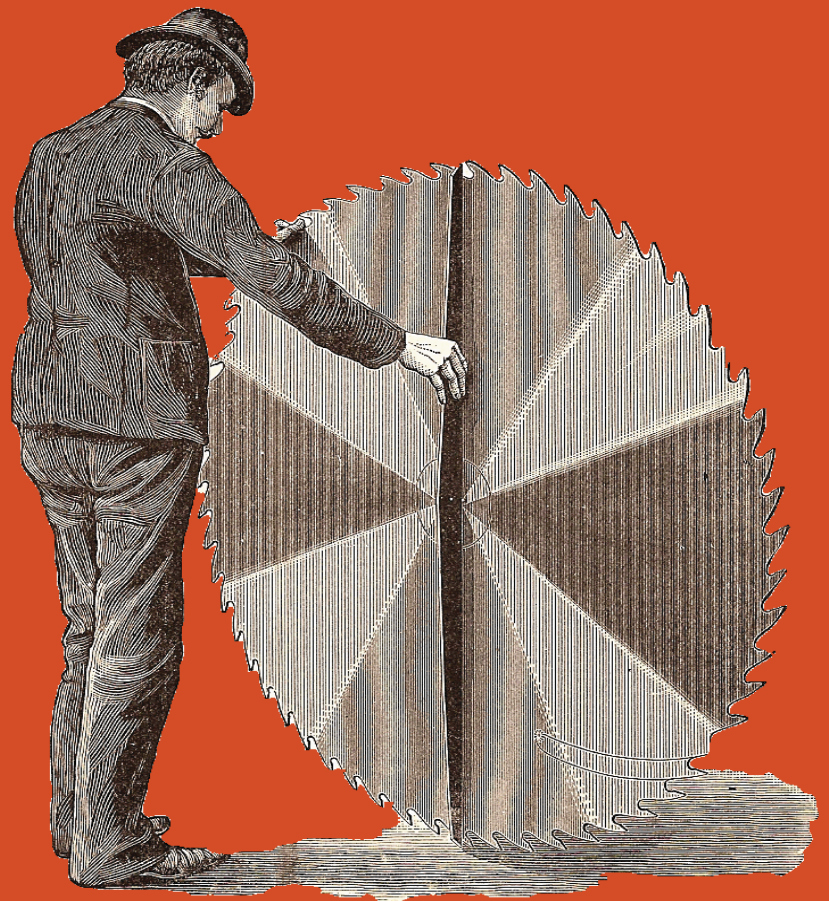
HISTORIC

DISSTON

TACONY'S COMPANY TOWN
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

PRESERVATION PLAN

**GRADUATE STUDIO IN
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
FALL 2008**



PRESERVATION PLAN



**HISTORIC DISSTON:
TACONY'S COMPANY TOWN**

Graduate Studio
Historic Preservation
University of Pennsylvania
Fall 2008

**PART I:
RESEARCH
& ANALYSIS**

Cover: Man with Saw. "Hand Book for Lumbermen with A Treatise on the Creation of Saws And How To Keep Them In Order." Disston & Sons Keystone Saw Company. 1902.

Disston Logo. "Disston Saw Tool and File Manual." 1930.

Interior Cover: Disston "D" Triangle. "Henry Disston & Sons Incorporated." 1918.

All available in the Archives of the Tacony Historical Society

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Tacony is a neighborhood in Northeast Philadelphia on the shore of the North Delaware River. The neighborhood's early history was largely shaped by Henry Disston, an English industrialist who moved his sawmill operations to Tacony starting in 1872.

Tacony's street grid does not lie true to the compass. For the purpose of locating buildings in this report, the roads running NE to SW (ex. Keystone Street and Torresdale Avenue) will be the N-S axes and those running SE to NW (ex. Longshore Avenue and Disston Street) will be E-W axes.¹

¹ Jacobs, James A. *Historic American Building Survey – No. PA-6692 (Tacony)*. Philadelphia, PA: National Park Service, 2001.

Introduction

“All I want is for Tacony and Disston to be put on the map.”

- Resident and Community Survey participant, in response to the question, “What changes would you like to see in Tacony in the next 10 years?”

Historic Disston

Tacony’s Company Town is a place made significant by the relationships that exist between memory, present community, and future revitalization. The purpose of this studio is to identify and develop a cohesive preservation plan to meet the historical, cultural, and economic needs of Historic Disston. Much of the historic fabric survives from the commercial, residential, institutional, open space, and industrial components of Henry Disston’s 19th and 20th century company town. The enduring nature of each component’s physical fabric acts a driving force in our view of the community and its continued preservation. Disston’s significance lies in the sum of these parts (Fig 0.1.1).

This report is organized around recommendations for each of Disston’s physical components, including a section on evolutionary mapping to visually demonstrate change over time. To better inform our work, studio members completed physical surveys of the commercial, residential, institutional, and industrial areas. Not only did these surveys show a significant amount of intact historic building fabric, but also supported the group’s consensus that a revitalized waterfront and commercial corridor, centered on the sensitive reuse of historic structures, is appropriate and achievable. Key findings and detailed preservation recommendations follow each individual report section. To better support these preservation initiatives, included are sections on the analysis of current plans and policy that affect Disston and Tacony. The study of comparables of other historic company towns provided context and helped us to measure Disston’s significance.



Fig. 0.1.1: 4900 Block Knorr Street. Source: Joseph Elliot, 2001.

The physical fabric of each part of Disston is united by their shared history: the Disston & Sons' Saw Works and its role in industrial Philadelphia's reputation as the "Workshop of the World." Studio members researched the neighborhood's written history and crafted a mission statement to effectively communicate the historical significance of Disston:

In 1872, Henry Disston began relocating his saw manufacturing company to Tacony. In addition to industrial buildings, he built a company town including residential, commercial, and institutional buildings and parks for his employees. The Disston family employed a paternalistic style of management and supported the community through 1944. Today, much of the physical fabric that made Historic Disston a cohesive company town remains (Fig. 0.1.2).

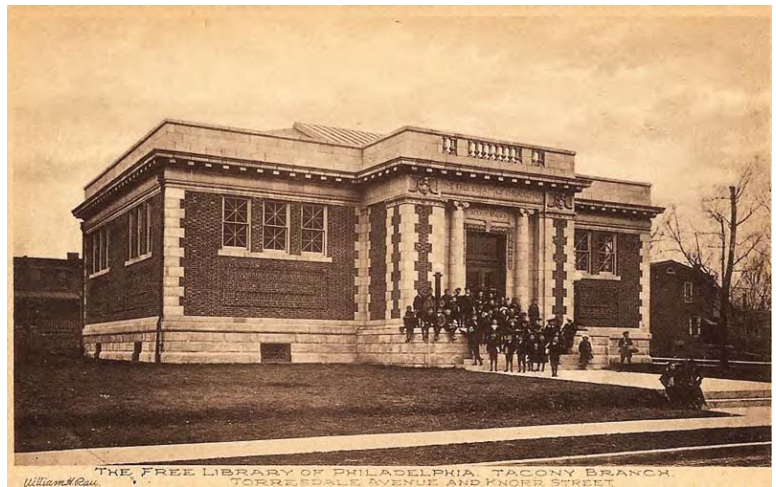


Fig. 0.1.2: The Free Library of Philadelphia, Tacony Branch. Source: William H. Rau, Date Unknown, Tacony Historical Society.

Disston's history is enlivened by a strong community presence. Neighborhood pride is evident in the community and is a direct result of leadership by civic organizations. This dedication to community has the potential to make many of the preservation outcomes recommended in this report a reality. Studio members administered written surveys to better understand how Tacony residents view their history, identify current challenges, and communicate their vision for the future. The findings of the physical and community surveys are enhanced by a branding strategy created to increase awareness about preservation and educate both residents and members of the public about Disston's history. The benefits of such a strategy and examples of marketing tools are discussed in the report's Branding section.

Much like the many parts of Disston, the contents of this report contribute to and build on one another. Each section's recommendations address not only the specific area in question, but also how those recommendations support and enhance the vision of Disston as a place to live and work. When viewed as a whole, these strategies and recommendations create a sustainable vision and have the power to put Historic Disston on the map.

Caitlin Kramer

Statement of Significance

The principal development and growth of Tacony began during the mid-19th century when Henry Disston, owner of Disston & Sons Keystone Saw Works, purchased three hundred acres in the Tacony area in order to relocate his company. In 1872 Disston began to develop the industrial area and gradually moved the saw works from the Kensington neighborhood. He selected Tacony because of its existing railroad terminus and its proximity to Philadelphia. As Tacony was still rural, it accommodated physical expansion of the factories but required development of housing and infrastructure for the firm's employees.

The historical significance of Tacony is rooted in its role as a company town, established by Henry Disston with the intention of increasing worker productivity by creating a healthy and stable community for his employees. Disston planned for a separation of land uses within the area such that green space, an existing railroad, and connecting corridors provided a buffer between the industrial area on the waterfront and the inland residential area. This design helped to promote Disston's physical and social visions for the community. Furthermore, taverns, alcohol, and relatively noxious industrial activities were forbidden and religious freedom was supported.

The Disstons were actively involved in the community's physical and social establishment and expansion. They made improvements to infrastructure, founded schools and sponsored community events. Because the Disston family maintained close connections to the Tacony neighborhood during the firm's principal operating years, the area's primary period of significance is from 1872, when Henry Disston began relocating his company, until 1944 when the Disston family ceased to own residential properties or maintain interest in social and institutional entities in Tacony.

The story of Tacony's development not only reflects the founding paternalistic philosophies of industrial company towns and the broad technological and industrial expansion of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but it also reinforces Philadelphia's reputation as the "workshop of the world." Because Disston Saws had such success and became a household name, Disston & Sons Keystone Saw Works and Tacony are important constituents in Philadelphia's diverse industrial history as well as landmarks of the Disston saw legacy.

The historical significance of Tacony continues to be visible in both

its physical and social fabric. First, community groups, such as the Tacony Historical Society, actively seek to preserve its historical integrity and promote its role in Philadelphia's industrial history through public awareness, community involvement and partnership with preservation organizations. Second, because elements of Disston's original land use, street design, and zoning ordinances remain in place, they continue to be integral to the neighborhood's character. Third, the core of Tacony's physical fabric remains intact, as seen in the present but neglected industrial buildings, the scale and massing of residential buildings, limited demolition and infill areas, surviving institutional buildings and public transit networks. Finally, the surviving vernacular architectural styles of the industrial, residential and institutional buildings reinforce the visual cohesion of the neighborhood. While these enduring attributes originated in history and were perhaps valued differently than they are now, they directly address contemporary urban issues and enforce Tacony's position as a significant neighborhood in the northeast Philadelphia region.

Jessica Kottke

HISTORY ¹

Henry Disston

Henry Disston (Fig. 2.2.1) was born in Tewkesbury, England in 1819. He immigrated to America in 1833 with his father, who had invented a machine for fine lace production and was enticed by investors to start a mill in Albany, New York. Henry's father died three days after their arrival at the port city of Philadelphia. Soon after his father's death Henry began an apprenticeship with the Lindley, Johnson & Whitecraft Company saw manufacturers. By 1840, Henry had the necessary capital to begin his own business, the Keystone Saw Works, which would become the largest saw manufacturer in the world. The quality of the product and the company's reputation made Disston a household name that is still recognized today. In order to establish a steady labor force for his factories, Disston purchased over three hundred acres of land in Tacony, located in the lower northeast section of Philadelphia, on which he established a company town. Henry Disston died in 1878. His descendants continued to run the company until 1955 when it was sold.



Fig. 2.2.1: Portrait of Henry Disston. Source: *The Disstonian Institute*. 25 November 2008. <www.DisstonianInstitute.com>.

The Keystone Saw Works

The history of Henry Disston & Sons saw manufacturing company began before Disston built his first factory in Tacony in 1872. Henry Disston founded his saw works in Philadelphia in 1840 and initially carried out all aspects of saw production himself. The company in this period was called Keystone Saw Works but was later renamed Henry Disston & Sons (Fig. 2.2.2 & 2.2.3). By 1859, Henry was able to afford the purchase of a neighboring lot on Laurel St. where he constructed his first plant (Fig. 2.2.4). Disston saws became known for their quality and dependability, which Henry carefully policed. Stories indicate that he would recall inferior products that were already in stores, even if it meant a loss in profit. Furthermore, Disston was willing to produce small-batch orders for customers who had special requests. This kept the company afloat during lean times.

¹ History of Henry Disston, his company and the town of Tacony (unless otherwise noted) from:

Harry Silcox, *A Place to Live and Work: the Henry Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

Henry also demonstrated a willingness to try new methods of production and invent new products. His factory on Laurel St. was the first in America to incorporate a crucible mill in the saw production process. This allowed him to produce his own high-quality steel at a time when the English had a virtual monopoly on the market. He also championed an invention of Englishman John Sylvester which allowed steel scraps that had formerly gone to waste to be pressed into ingots and re-used. Henry Disston constantly looked for new ways to improve the design of his product. He invented the skewed-back saw whose design used less steel and was easier to use and experimented with innovative ways to fit teeth into saw blades as well.

During the 1860s, Disston's operations grew substantially. War-time production of steel goods such as bayonets and steel plating for war vessels infused the company with the cash that was needed for expansion. Business was further increased by a successful marketing strategy that involved the publication of print ads and manuals (Fig. 2.2.5). In the same period, tensions among ethnic and religious groups, labor unrest, unionizing forces and incidents of employee drunkenness disrupted the workforce. These experiences provided Disston with the impetus for moving to Tacony.

Tacony

Henry began to look to the outskirts of the city for a place to move his growing company. His brother had purchased land in an area known as Tacony—a relatively undeveloped place with a tavern and a handful of houses. Tacony bordered on the Delaware River as well as a New-York-to-Philadelphia railroad line which made it an advantageous location for a factory. It also had the necessary space to build housing for Disston's workers. In 1872, Henry purchased 6 water-front acres and began to build the file works, the first of many factory buildings. The relocation of other operations was carefully planned, beginning in 1872 with the mill and ending in 1899 with the jobbing shop. Moving the twelve shops was done in stages to maintain productivity at the plant.

The problems of housing hundreds of workers when only an inn was available caused Henry to buy an additional 300 acres and plan out a residential community, separated from his industrial site by Disston Park. Once the lots were surveyed, Disston built roughly 600 homes, mostly in the "twin" style, which he believed allowed air and light to reach the homes. Workers were given the option of renting a home or purchasing one. After Disston's death, many of these properties



Fig. 2.2.2: Keystone Saw Works Logo. Source: *WK Fine Tools*. 25 November 2008. <<http://www.wkfine-tools.com/hUS/saws/Disston/index.asp>>.



Fig. 2.2.3: Henry Disston & Sons Logo from a No. 8 Saw. Source: *The Disstonian Institute*. 25 November 2008. <<http://www.disstonianinstitute.com/8page.html>>.

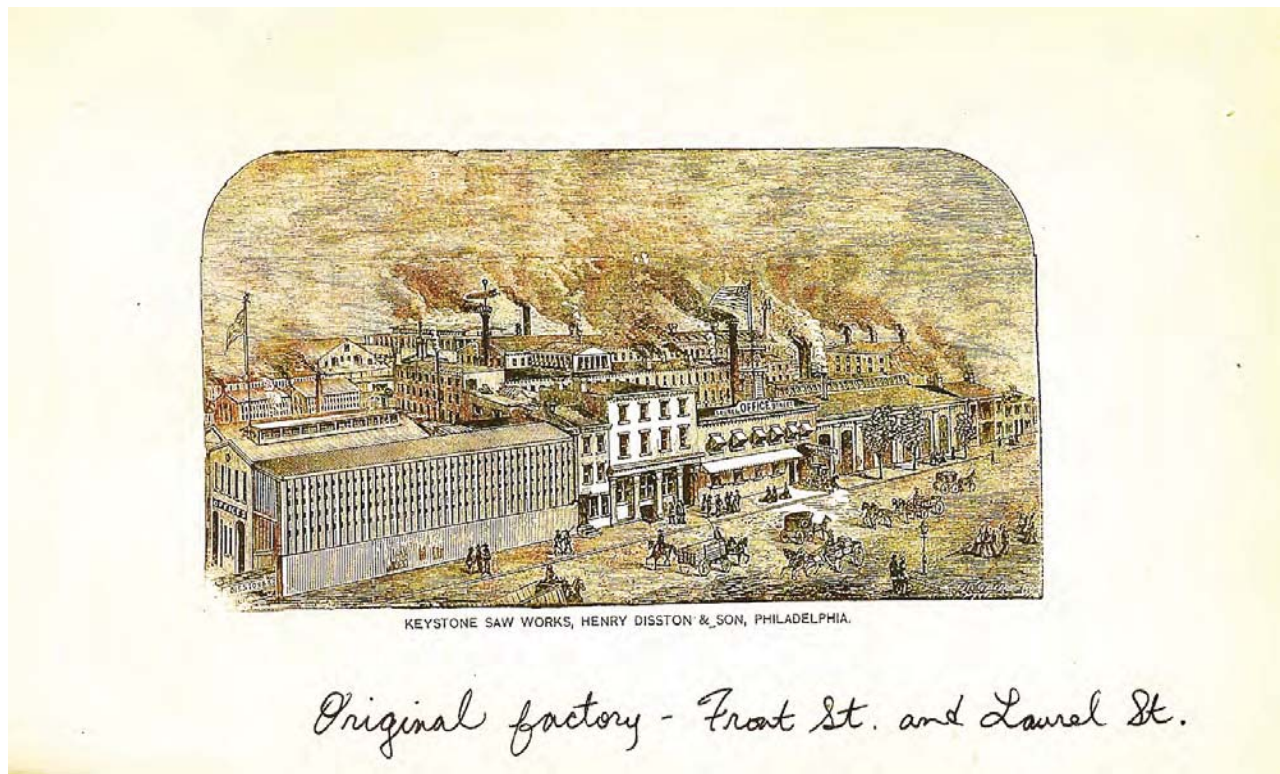


Fig. 2.2.4 “Keystone Saw Works, Henry Disston & Son, Philadelphia” with inscription “Front St. & Laurel St.” Tacony Archives.



Fig. 2.2.5: A page from the pamphlet “The Saw in History” (1916) published by Henry Disston & Sons. Tacony Archives.

were sold off but the family still owned an estimated 360 homes when the estate of Henry's wife, Mary, was liquidated in 1944.

Disston's town went beyond merely providing housing for workers. It was what could be considered part of the "Utopian" community at that time. The Disston family provided utilities for a fee, created the Tacony Savings Fund Society in 1874 to help workers finance their housing purchases, schools, and provided land for churches. The Music Hall, built in 1885, provided an entertainment venue, ground-floor retail space, and a library for the betterment of the workers.² Disston family members and close friends ran a number of these organizations. Thus, the Disston family was involved in virtually every facet of a worker's life. Until trolley service was instituted it was difficult work in areas beyond the boundaries of Tacony. To work at the Disston factory meant living in Tacony, and vice versa (Fig. 2.2.6).

Workers and their families were provided healthy, stable living conditions and in turn, these conditions proved equally beneficial to the saw works. An enjoyable community where many employees owned land meant a more content workforce and one which was less likely to leave overnight. Henry Disston instituted controls that would prevent the type of disruption he experienced at his Laurel Street factory. Deed restrictions prevented the production and sale of alcohol on Disston land. They also served to protect the quality of life in the area by prohibiting manufacturing, stables, and other polluting activities. Churches were restricted from having bells, since Disston's experience in Philadelphia showed him that they were often used by drunk and rowdy firefighters. There was no provision for the creation of a town hall that could prove to be a platform for political activism. Apprenticeship contracts for local youth (most of who worked at the factory) contained stipulations that young men would not drink, gamble, or betray company secrets.

Disston's paternalistic management style made him a much-loved figure among his workers. He was known as someone that would give a man a job if he was out of work, and as someone who went to great lengths to ensure that he



Fig. 2.2.6: Scenes from life in Tacony, circa 1915.
Source: *The Tacony Archives*.

² Information on other buildings created for Disston factory workers can be found later in this section.

could continue to provide employment. In times of economic hardship, he would cut wages to ensure that everyone could still have work and his workers, in turn, trusted him to increase pay when circumstances improved. Disston historian Harry Silcox quotes a letter to the factory's staff in 1867:

*Then again I say, let us put our best exertions together and see if we can keep full time....I only ask you to help me make some small portion of the reduction and the reason I shall ask it is because I know it will be to your benefit in the long run. We can keep up the prices but be short of work, and short time will pay neither you nor me. Now please allow me to thank you for all your past and present evidence of good wishes, and I assure you that my greatest exertions shall be spent in trying to make both you and your dear family as happy as possible, and at any time when you are in trouble, sickness or distress, I shall certainly take great pleasure in trying all I know to make you happy.*³

As further evidence of the Disstons' benevolence, the Tacony Savings Fund Society did not once foreclose on a worker's home, even when they could not afford their mortgage payments. Trust in the good intentions of the Disston family got the company through many economic crises and endured until well into the 20th century.

In order to stay on good terms with the workers, Henry and visited the shops every day. He made an effort to know every worker and often participated in the work himself. His sons were required to learn the business from the ground up like their father and were only permitted to enter management positions after completion of a lengthy apprenticeship in the shops. Not only did this ensure that they knew the saw business from every angle, it allowed the Disston family members to bond with the workers and maintain the system that Henry had established. Until the late 1940s, every Disston male apprenticed at the saw works before taking control of the company (Fig. 2.2.7).



Fig. 2.2.7: Disston saw factory workers. Source: *The Tacony Archives*.

3 Silcox 19

Unionization

Unionization did not find a ready foothold in Philadelphia in the 19th century. Most laborers did not work in the large factories that were a hotbed for unions around the country. In addition, they were skilled workers that had considerably more clout than their unskilled counterparts.

This was true at the Disston factory as well. Saw makers were very highly skilled after spending many years learning their craft and at the Disston plant they were treated well. With the exception of a few small incidents in the 1880s, the Tacony plant did not experience much labor activism during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The organized labor movement that contributed to the end of the Disston family's tenure at the factory began during the Great Depression. Between 1925 and 1933, the plant was forced to cut its labor force from 2,500 workers to just 1,400 workers. Around the same time, industrial welfare programs focused on the family and worker health replaced the paternalistic approach that Henry had adopted. The company newsletter, "Disston Bits" (Fig. 2.2.8), encouraged cooperation and good will among workers, a cafeteria was created, and health and safety became the new focus for management. Although the beginnings of World War II helped to build profits again, the tensions created by the Depression caused many unskilled Disston workers to ally themselves with the newly-created Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Its rival organization, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) competed with the CIO for members and caused trouble between the workers and with management. In an election, Disston workers elected the AFL to be the official union of the plant. The AFL in turn began to push the plant to declare a closed shop but the Disston family refused. Disston historian Harry Silcox credits the continuing escalation of tensions in the factory to this decision. On May 14 of 1940, the Disstons planned a 100-year anniversary of the company. As a symbolic gesture, the AFL planned a strike for this day and as workers left they destroyed the improvements to the facilities that the



Fig. 2.2.8: "Disston Bits," September, 1919 Edition.
Source: *The Tacony Archives*.

family had installed for the anniversary. Silcox recognizes this as a major break in the good relations between workers and management that had existed since the company's founding.

Another factor in the company's decline was the failure of new product development. Henry Disston's descendants had continued his tradition of innovation and experimentation that the founder had advocated. In 1941, they entered into a contract with the Kiekenhafer Company, manufacturer of motors, to produce a two-man chain-saw. Kiekenhafer never lived up to his promise to develop a motor that was suitably light for the job and the project stalled. When John D. Thompson of Roebling Steel became president of the company in 1953, he attempted to reinvigorate the company by spurring the development of a one-man chainsaw. He tried to hire workers from the Kiekenhafer Company who knew how to build motors, but only ended up being sued by Kiekenhafer for breach of contract. The one-man chainsaw project came to a halt, violating the terms of the \$3.5 million loan that was used to finance it. All of the money had to be returned at once. Faced with paying off this massive debt, and still shaken by the labor activism of the 1940s, the Disston family made the decision to sell.

In 1955, the Disstons sold the company to Samuel Mellon Evans of HK Porter, a business speculator. They had sold off the remaining Disston-owned housing stock in 1944, so the selling of the factory brought an end to the family's presence in the community. HK Porter moved operations to Virginia and raided the company pension fund to pay off the inherited \$3.5 million debt, leaving many of the factory buildings on the water abandoned. Later, HK Porter sold the business to a Swedish saw-maker, Sandvick, who later sold to R.A.F. Industries. The company continues to operate under the name "Disston Precision."

Henry Disston & Sons in the Context of the Industrial Revolution

Philadelphia's experience with Industrialization was different than that of other areas in the country. With few waterfalls to power mill machinery and a highly skilled workforce, the area did not feel as much pressure to build large mills employing unskilled machine operators as did New England.⁴ Instead, most industry could be characterized as family-owned businesses that produced a specialty

⁴ Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century (The American Moment)* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 34.

product.⁵

The negative impact of England's prior switch to industrialism made some leading figures wary of bringing it to the United States.⁶ Benjamin Franklin warned that:

*Manufactures are founded in poverty for it is the multitude of poor without land in a country, and who must work for others at low wages or starve, that enables undertakers to carry on manufacture.*⁷

James Madison and other prominent figures agreed that factory work merely created an undesirable situation in which masses of poor were crowded into America's cities.⁸ The large number of English laborers who had recently arrived added to these tensions their penchant for labor activism --attempting to gain control of their trades by regulating apprenticeship.⁹ They were also vocal in their opposition of what they saw to be the growing wealth disparity.¹⁰ Many of these workers were young transients who lived in "... rough-and-tumble wards known for their saloons, amusement halls, unruly fire brigades, street gangs, and rich street life..."¹¹ Production was affected and money lost. For some businessmen, like Henry Disston, the solution was to create a new town with rules that governed drinking and gambling.¹²

Industrial historian Walter Licht acknowledges that there were financial motives for paternalistic programs like Disston's, but also notes that "Moral visions and not just economic calculations guided these ventures..."¹³ Many men like Henry Disston were familiar with the concerns of English laborers and used their place at the head of a company to ensure the welfare of their employees. Key features of the companies established by these men were insurance and loan programs, housing and recreational facilities, among other things. Later, economic forces and unionization led to the end of paternalism and companies turned to industrial welfare programs to motivate and unite workers just as the Disston Company did in their

5 Walter Licht, *Getting Work: Philadelphia 1840-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 7.

6 Licht, *Industrializing America* 16

7 Licht, *Industrializing America* 15

8 Licht, *Industrializing America* 15

9 Licht, *Getting Work* 108

10 Licht, *Industrializing America* 56

11 Licht, *Industrializing America* 72

12 See the "Comparables" section of this report

13 Licht, *Industrializing America* 41

Tacony factory.¹⁴ Eventually, a more formalized relationship between workers and management would arise, administered through personnel departments.¹⁵

The trajectory of the business, "...from home production to domestic outwork, centralization, an increased division of labor factory building and last, mechanization." is another similarity that ties Henry Disston & Sons to contemporary area manufacturers.¹⁶ Licht identifies this as a common path for a business to follow in the period. He cites examples like the Wetherill paint company and the factory of William J. Young, which manufactured survey devices.¹⁷ Another key trait that the Disston Company also shares is that the companies survived through the production of custom, small-batch products.¹⁸

Henry Disston's saw works are emblematic of the larger history of industrialism in the Philadelphia area. In terms of paternalism, unionization, product specialization and evolution over time, it parallels the rise and fall of many other companies in the area. The Disston Companies, together with its contemporaries, earned Philadelphia the title "Workshop of the World".¹⁹

Melissa Steeley

14 Licht, *Getting Work* 144. This is one of several explanations for the increased popularity of personnel departments and new incentives for workers.

15 Licht, *Getting Work* 161-162. For further information on company towns, see the "Comparables" section of this report.

16 Licht, *Industrializing America* 29

17 Licht, *Industrializing America* 31

18 Licht, *Industrializing America* 32-33

19 Workshop of the World—Philadelphia. 25 November 2008. <<http://www.workshopoftheworld.com/index.html>>.

Comparables

History of the Company Town

Since the Industrial Revolution began in the United States, scholars and industrialists alike have been touting the benefits of the “company town” as a way to merge industrial development with social responsibility. A company town has been defined as “a community inhabited chiefly by the employees of a single company or group of companies which also owns a substantial part of the real estate and houses.”¹ Henry Disston’s factory and residential development in Tacony, Pennsylvania, outside the city of Philadelphia is a prime example of an historic company town. However, to understand where Historic Disston fits into the longstanding tradition of joining residential and industrial development, it is necessary to take a look at the evolution of the company town.

One of the most famous examples of an early company town is Lowell, Massachusetts. Founded in 1822, Lowell was a textile manufacturing town that was run on strict paternalistic principles. Industrial paternalism is a system of management in which “employers used their control over workers’ daily lives to impose various types of structured dependency.”² Much scholarly discourse exists on the varieties of paternalism that were utilized in company towns. Philip Scranton says, “the content of paternalism as a manufacturing practice involved overlapping spheres of provision, protection, and control, sometimes a vast array of services and restrictions, and on occasion an informal and genuine commitment to fair dealing and reciprocal concern.”³

In the early textile-based company towns like Lowell that were prominent during the period from 1790 to 1850 (defined by Margaret Crawford), paternalism was often literally interpreted. In Lowell, the main workforce was young single women. These women were housed in boarding houses and moral standards were strictly upheld. The town was not formally planned as a cohesive urban landscape, instead, typical industrial units were built within the factory boundaries and the area outside was left for residential and commercial development that expanded with increased need (Fig. 2.3.1).

1 Crawford, Margaret. *Building the Workingman’s Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns*. New York: Verso, 1995, 1.

2 Crawford, 12.

3 Scranton, Philip. “Varieties of Paternalism: Industrial Structures and the Social Relations of Production in American Textiles.” *American Quarterly* 36.2 (1984): 237.

As industrial development progressed in the second half of the 19th century, company towns began to spring up around the country, following no common physical pattern.⁴ Many companies still employed elements of industrial paternalism, using measures of control such as running company stores, renting housing, leasing instead of selling land for development, and restricting the sale of alcohol. Crawford describes the transition to “new paternalism” as companies’ increasing justification of “good works in terms of economic rationality.”⁵ Employers believed that healthy and contented workers would be less likely to strike or cause other disruptions to production. Many employers also began a more formal planning of the layout of their towns.

The most famous example of this period (1850-1900) is Pullman, Illinois, which is discussed in the following section. However there were many less famous examples. In the Philadelphia area, in addition to Historic Disston, the John B. Stetson Company formed a company town around their factory complex in the lower Kensington area (Fig. 2.3.2). The factory was relocated to a row house at 4th Street and Montgomery Avenue around 1867. At this location, the company grew to a complex of 25 buildings on nine acres by the early 20th century.⁶

The Stetson factories and workers’ housing did not grow in an undeveloped area. However, “the surrounding neighborhood row houses acted as a company town.”⁷ Paternalistic involvement took place in the form of education, a hospital, religious services, entertainment and athletics, and community events. Through the Stetson Building and Loan Association, Stetson encouraged workers to settle near the plant, and he “influenced the design of some of these houses, insisting on maximizing light and airflow.”⁸

After the well publicized 1894 Pullman strike, companies sought to avoid similar problems in their new company towns. Apollo Steel founded Vandergrift, Pennsylvania in 1895, but sold lots for homes and did not regulate the style of building. The American Bridge



Fig. 2.3.1: Lowell Mills. Source: www.NPS.gov.



Fig. 2.3.2: Stetson Hat Company. Source: *Pennsylvania State Archives, explorepahistory.com*.

4 Crawford, 29.

5 Crawford, 32.

6 Snyder, Jeffrey B. *Stetson Hats and the John B. Stetson Hat Company: 1865-1970*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1997, 51.

7 Snyder, 55.

8 Snyder, 56. Today the Stetson factory complex no longer stands. The majority was demolished by the City of Philadelphia in 1979, and the remaining buildings were destroyed by arson in 1980. Though it was not a formally planned company town, it is interesting to note that similar paternalistic practices were employed around the same time and place as Historic Disston.

Company planned and built Ambridge, Pennsylvania and immediately sold the homes to their employees.⁹ Roebling, New Jersey, built just after the turn of the century and which will be discussed in detail in a later section, attempted to learn from Pullman's mistakes as well, though they still retained the practice of company-owned rental housing.

The planning and construction of company towns changed in the 20th century. Prior to 1900, very few company towns were formally designed by architects or landscape architects. Some were planned by surveyors or engineers of their respective companies, and many had little to no planning or formal layout at all. After 1900, design professionals such as architects, landscape architects, and urban planners became much more involved in attempting to solve social and industrial problems through the design of company towns.¹⁰

The Progressive Movement around the turn of the century also encouraged "industrial betterment" or welfare, which was "an updated form of paternalism" that "attempted to create a new sense of identification between employer and employee."¹¹ These efforts included the company provision of cleaner factories, hospitals, newspapers, social events, profit sharing, group insurance, and sports and recreation. Hershey, Pennsylvania, founded in 1903, is an excellent example of a company town where industrial welfare was a primary concern of the company (Fig 2.3.3).

Ultimately, company towns faced similar challenges in the mid-20th century, which led to the demise of many. The availability of more public transportation, as well as personal automobiles, increased worker mobility and eliminated the need to live very close to work. The economic downturn of the Depression created challenges for all companies, often necessitating the elimination of welfare programs that were so common in company towns. The New Deal policies also discouraged company-owned housing as "feudal and repugnant" and instead encouraged government provision of low-income housing.¹² Finally, unionization played a large role in separating the perceived goals of workers and employers, causing a breakdown of the company town system. In times of economic trouble, many family-owned companies sold their residential holdings, and ultimately were forced to sell the company as well.



Fig. 2.3.3: Hershey Chocolate Factory, c. 1930. Source: Hershey Community Archives, explorepahistory.com.

9 Crawford, 43.
10 Crawford, 61.
11 Crawford, 48.
12 Crawford, 202.

The following are detailed examples of two company towns that bear many similarities to Historic Disston. One, Pullman, Illinois, was short-lived but infamous, and the other, Roebling, New Jersey, endured a less famous but longer existence. Both offer insight to why Disston is unique and significant, as well as how the history of company towns can be preserved today.

Sarah Van Domelen

Pullman, IL

History

During the late 1870s, railroad magnate George Pullman (Fig. 2.3.4) decided that his company would benefit from relocation to the open lands of the South Side of Chicago. Established in 1880, Pullman, Illinois became the center of domestic rail production and received worldwide acclaim as a successful paternalistic community based on the “Pullman System.” Pullman’s vision was simple; through the harmonization of town and factory he would attract a ‘supreme’ workforce whose quality of life would be elevated as a result of the beautiful landscape. Pullman hired architect Solon Spencer Beman to design both an urban plan and the individual structures throughout. In addition to the built fabric, an artificial lake was created to act as a divisor between the factories and the residential houses (Fig. 2.3.5).

To Pullman, his company town was “strictly a business proposition.”¹³ He chose not to sell houses, but rather rented them all, enabling him to control all fees for future markup and speculation. Nonetheless, he believed that the overall quality of life would minimize much of the labor unrest that had begun to creep into the nation’s industrial workforce. Pullman felt that this resulting happiness would lead to higher productivity and a “reduction of absenteeism, drinking, and shirking on the job,” all things Pullman attributed to a profession largely based in the doldrums of an urban setting.¹⁴

The Panic of 1893 marked the beginning of the



Fig. 2.3.4: Portrait of George Pullman. Source: <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/pullman.html>.



Fig. 2.3.5: View of the South Factory Building along the artificial lake. Source: <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/pullman.html>.

13 Silcox, Harry C. *A Place to Live and Work: The Henry Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, 28.

14 Silcox, 28.

end for Pullman's vision; the economic depression that hit virtually every domestic sector eventually took its toll on the rail industry, causing Pullman to lay off hundreds of workers while refusing to lower rents. This lack of respect created unrest amongst the workers, "who resented his making a profit on every aspect of their lives."¹⁵ In 1894, the town became the "center of labor and social disturbances," both as a result of the Panic and Pullman's failures as a paternal figure.¹⁶

Comparison to Disston

As previously mentioned, Pullman saw his venture strictly as a profitable entity, choosing to rent his houses rather than sell, giving him the ability to continually raise rents. In addition, it was said that he visited the town only six times after 1890, most of which were for ceremonies. According to Harry Silcox, "Historian Stanley Buder points out that the Pullman Company suffered from a lack of formal lines of communication between employer and employees, which meant 'that the workers did not approach management until cumulative grievances etched deep suspicions which predisposed the men to a hasty and emotional reaction.'"¹⁷

It is quite clear that the approaches of both George Pullman and Henry Disston, while similar in some aspects, differ greatly from one another. While both Pullman and Disston were founded upon paternalistic visions based on "landownership and control of the town's political and social activities," there was a divergent approach regarding their social and business models.¹⁸ Pullman fit the bill of the robber baron, incredibly entrenched in notoriety, corporate growth, and the accumulation of wealth. His approach to a functioning industry was less hands-on than it was corporate; the superficiality created in his company town exhibits Pullman's ignorance to the constantly evolving social dynamic. Disston, on the other hand, required apprenticeship by all of his sons to not only understand and respect the trades, but to maintain a close, working relationship between the officers and the workers. This line of communication was enhanced by Disston's practice of hiring most, if not all, of his male children to apprentice in his workshops, enabling a "direct line of communication between the workers and the [Disston] family."¹⁹ Silcox goes on to note, "clearly both formal and informal lines of

15 Silcox, 28.

16 Silcox, 28.

17 Silcox, 31.

18 Silcox, 31.

19 Silcox, 30.

communication connected the workers to the Disston family, and the town to the factory.”²⁰

Another difference between Pullman and Disston’s approaches lies in the provision of residential housing within their towns (Fig. 2.3.6). Unlike Pullman, who felt that the housing and the factory were both profit-gaining holdings, Disston promoted homeownership through flexible mortgages and rents that reflected the current market trends. Rather than alienating the potential workforce, Disston raised and lowered both mortgages and wages based on the economy, asking his workers to stand by him in times of economic hardship in return for future growth that would result from an eventual economic upswing. Silcox summarizes, “People in Tacony believed that the Disston family was interested in them, while the people in Pullman saw themselves as mere puppets in a scheme to make George Pullman and his stockholders rich. These differences in perception allowed Disston to settle work disruptions and keep labor unions from organizing, while Pullman experienced labor difficulties that eventually led to the demise of his experimental industrial town.”²¹

Finally, the physical appearances of Pullman and Disston are similar. Though Pullman was formally designed (Fig. 2.3.7), and Disston was only planned, both utilize very similar housing styles: mainly brick row houses and twins, and fewer larger singles. The Disston Estate included over 600 housing units, while the town of Pullman eventually included 1,750. It is also worth mentioning that while the industrial area of Disston was clearly separated from the residential area by the railroad and Disston Park, the industrial buildings of Pullman were actually placed at the center of town, with the residential development around them.²²

Preservation Efforts

By the 1960s, the Chicago Planning Commission identified the southern region of Chicago (which included Pullman) as a former industrial sector that had continuously declined into a state of blight. The architecturally designed brick rowhomes had become “marginal” and



Fig. 2.3.6: View of Pullman’s architecturally designed houses along St. Laurence Street. Source: <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/pullman.html>



Fig. 2.3.7: View of Pullman Park. Source: Pearson, Arthur M. “Historic Pullman’s Other Architect: Nathan Franklin Barrett.” *Illinois Heritage* (2005): 25.

20 Silcox, 30.

21 Silcox, 31.

22 Snell, Charles W. “Pullman Historic District, National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form.” 1970.

many of the later stick-frame buildings had declined even further (Fig. 2.3.8).²³ The Commission's response was that the entire area should be demolished and rebuilt as an industrial park. The townspeople and local organizations, along with architects and preservationists, banded together in disagreement and fought for the town's legacy as the nation's premiere example of a planned company town (Fig. 2.3.9). The local groups pushed absentee homeowners to improve their structures, the Historic Pullman Foundation raised money to purchase significant public buildings, they purchased a historic Pullman railcar for possible re-use as a railroad museum, residents opened their homes for architectural tours, and others published cookbooks and held events to bring attention to their cause.

In 1971, the town of South Pullman became a National Historic Landmark District, and the following year was designated a City Historic Landmark District by Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley.²⁴ According to Janice Reiff and Susan Hirsch, the architectural value and residential aspects of the town were the efforts' saving grace, all of which came at a time when city planning and urban renewal efforts were at a high.²⁵ They state that "creating a stable, residential neighborhood had been the goal, and the best of the housing, built for management, foremen, and the most highly skilled workers, had been the focus."²⁶

Interestingly, though included in the Historic District boundaries, the factory sites of Pullman are not a main focus of interpretation. Reiff and Hirsch note that unlike Lowell, the railcar industry relied on factories of a much larger scale and the financial burdens of such a venture were considerably problematic. In addition, many fear that interpretation of the industrial sites would only recall much of the labor and ethnic strife that led to the company's downfall, an aspect of the town's history most feel is better left alone. Instead, the residents view the vision, the planning, and the architecture as the most important aspects of their town. Nonetheless, with the help of the Illinois Labor History Society, the town cre-



Fig. 2.3.8: 1969 image of the severely altered housing along St. Laurence Street. Source: <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/pullman.html>



Fig. 2.3.9: Aerial view of Pullman. Source: <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/pullman.html>

23 Reiff, Janice L., and Susan E. Hirsch. "Pullman and Its Public: Image and Aim in Making and Interpreting History." *The Public Historian* (1989): 107.

24 Reiff and Hirsch, 108.

25 Reiff and Hirsch, 108.

26 Reiff and Hirsch, 108.

ated an interpretive model for education on the contributions of the Pullman Company and its workers to the nation's labor history. The tour chronicles the labor unrest and the discontent that plagued the latter years of the company, but also creates a disconnect between the labor and the architecture; it does not deal at all with the planning or architectural aspects of the town, but rather focuses solely on the lives and trials of the company's workers.

On the other hand, a film created in 1983 created a connection between the planning of the town and the history of the workforce, the only instance of such a practice. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, at a time of rapid domestic deindustrialization, the last Pullman, Inc. factory was closed in the town. As a result of the decline of industrial sites on the South Side of Chicago, many of the surrounding neighborhoods declined, altering the economics and demographics of Pullman and the outlying area. Despite the downturn, the citizens once again banded together to maximize what they had left. With the help of state and local officials, the public buildings were restored and reused, along with the reuse of the old "wheel works" building as loft apartments in North Pullman, marking the inclusion of North Pullman into the Historic District.

In 1991, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency purchased the Hotel Florence (Fig. 2.3.10), along with the historic Clock Tower and the Pullman Administration Buildings as a part of the formation of the Pullman State Historic Site.²⁷ In 1998, a suspected arsonist set the Clock Tower on fire, severely setting the restoration efforts back. The formation of the "Pullman Factory Task Force" helped local interest groups assess the present values of historic elements within the town. Along with the aforementioned structures within the Historic Site, the front lawn of the south factory building was to be preserved to "reflect the original landscaping design (including a water feature, like the original Lake Vista)."²⁸ What sets the recent preservation efforts apart from those in the past is the acknowledgement of the importance of the landscape, an aspect of the town's original design that heightened the picturesque



Fig. 2.3.10: Historic Image of the Hotel Florence.
Source: <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/pullman.html>



Fig. 2.3.11: Roebling, c. 1948. Source: *Roebling Magazine*, www.inventionfactory.com/history/RHASoc.

27 "The Town of Pullman." Historic Pullman Foundation. 4 Oct. 2008
<<http://www.pullmanil.org/town.htm>>.

28 Pearson, Arthur M. "Historic Pullman's Other Architect: Nathan Franklin Barrett." *Illinois Heritage* (2005): 25.

vision of George Pullman in a parallel manner to that of the architecture.

Pierson Booher

Roebling, NJ

History

In 1905, the John A. Roebling's Sons Company founded a company town in Florence Township in Burlington County, New Jersey. The town, originally called Kinkora, was an ideal location for the expansion of the steel wire manufacturer's facilities. They had outgrown the available space at their Trenton complex, and the new location offered the ideal combination of access to both river and rail for their new steel mills. Located on the Delaware River and the Camden and Amboy Railroad, Kinkora, which soon came to be known as Roebling, became a "particularly successful example of a planned, industrial community."²⁹

The company originally purchased 250 acres on which to build their mills. Though the location was ideal for transportation of goods, it also lacked a sufficient workforce for the company. Denying any motives of promoting worker welfare, the company decided to build a company town to support the necessary workforce (Fig. 2.3.11). As quoted by Martha Moore, the Roebblings told the *New York Herald* in 1906, "Having determined upon Kinkora as the site for the expansion of our mills we were forced to build houses for the men to live in who will be employed there. Inasmuch as we had to build houses anyway, we are building as well as we know how, and incidentally are providing some other things for the benefit



Fig. 2.3.12: Roebling, present. Source: Google Maps.



Fig. 2.3.13: Main Street in Roebling, facing the Main Gate, 1910. Source: *Images of America: Roebling*.

29 Mills, Michael. "Roebling Historic District, National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form." 1976.

of our employees.”³⁰

The town was laid out in a rectilinear grid to the west of the gate house to the mill complex with the two wide principal streets intersecting at a central circle (Fig. 2.3.12). A variety of housing types were built by the company, including larger single homes, twins, and smaller row houses, eventually totaling 767 houses in 1921. Housing typologies corresponded to rents, as well as the workers’ status within the company. The Roeblings provided all of the necessary infrastructure and utilities for the town, as well as maintenance of streets, yards, and homes, both exterior and interior (Figs. 2.3.13 and 2.3.14). The town was a clean and pleasant place to live, but because the company did not sell any of the homes, renters were subject to eviction at the company’s sole discretion.³¹



Fig. 2.3.14: Row houses on 2nd Avenue in Roebling, 1911. Source: *Images of America: Roebling*.

Roebling residents would have little cause to leave the town, as the company built a store that provided a wide variety of necessities. Unlike previous towns’ company stores, they accepted cash only, eliminating the practice of workers becoming indebted to their employer. The Roeblings also did not restrict alcohol in their town, though the company hotel housed the only operating saloon. Additionally the company provided a school, library, post office, hospital, parks and sports facilities, and other amenities.

The town ran successfully alongside the mills well into the mid-20th century. However, a common threat to the stability of company towns throughout the country eventually came to Roebling in the 1940s—the unions. In 1941 the Steel Workers Organizing Committee fought for and won unionization at the Roebling facility, symbolizing “the first breakdown in the Roebling ‘system.’”³² In 1947 the company sold the residential properties in response to the union’s reaction to a potential rent hike. In 1953 the Roeblings sold the company to the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, finalizing the end of Roebling as a company town.

30 Moore, Martha. “Our Town: Company Paternalism and Community Participation in Roebling, New Jersey.” unpublished, 1982. 25 Nov 2008 <<http://www.inventionfactory.com/history/RHAsoc/>>.

31 Moore.

32 Moore.

Comparison to Disston

Roebing has been effectively compared and contrasted to the famous Pullman, Illinois (see Martha Moore's 1982 essay). Even at the town's inception, the Roeblings were aware of the well publicized failure of the Pullman company town, and they sought to avoid the same pitfalls of the strict "paternalistic" methods employed at Pullman. While they advertised their town as a strictly capitalistic venture, their provision of quality housing and amenities for their residents strongly resembled a paternalist management style. By retaining ownership of the housing stock and all commercial ventures within the town limits, the Roeblings held absolute control over the resident workers.

While initially serving the same purpose, to attract and support workers at a new and relatively remote industrial complex, the residential development in Disston was not comprised solely of rental properties. Disston offered workers the option of renting or buying company constructed homes, or buying lots for their own home construction. This option likely gave workers in Disston greater perceived freedom, and may have lessened any oppressive paternalistic overtones.

Aside from the practice of renting versus selling housing, Roebing and Disston bear strong similarities. Though Roebing was founded three decades after Disston, both towns relied on steel based industries. They were also similar in size and planning. Both locations were chosen based on proximity to the Delaware River and rail transportation, and both required the addition of infrastructure to support a new workforce.

Neither of these towns or their architecture were formally designed by an architect or landscape architect, as would become more common in the first few decades of the 20th century. However, they were both well planned by their respective companies. Both included a clear separation between the industrial complex and the residential area. In Disston this was accomplished by the railroad and Disston Park, and in Roebing, the main gate house provided this distinction. Both residential areas were laid out in rectilinear form, with different types of housing for the various levels of workers employed by Disston and Roebing. Though stylistically different due to the decades between their construction, the typologies are functionally identical. Both towns include a variety of brick row houses, twins or duplexes, and larger single homes for the highest ranking employees and their families. The Disstons eventually owned over 600 homes (though

the town was likely larger due to the practice of selling homes and properties), and the Roeblings' ownership peaked at 767 homes.³³

As noted earlier, both Disston and Roebling ran their company towns with paternalistic methods, and both utilized various welfare efforts such as schools, hospitals, and recreational facilities, to keep their employees content. Additionally, both the Disston and Roebling families retained control over and familiarity with their workers by apprenticing and employing the men of the family to continue plant operations. While Disston forbade the production and sale of alcohol in his town, the Roeblings allowed drinking, but controlled and benefited from its sale by placing the only bar in the company-run hotel. However, Disston was more liberal in allowing privately owned commercial ventures within the town, while the Roeblings owned and operated the company store and all other commercial entities.

Finally, both company towns met their ultimate demise around the same time due to similar causes. Both faced unionization and both were forced to sell off their residential holdings in the 1940s; Disston in 1944 and Roebling in 1947. John A. Roebling's Sons Company was sold in 1953, and Disston & Sons was sold in 1955.

There has been no formal comparison between Disston and Roebling by any of the many scholars of company towns, so it is impossible to say if the Roeblings were at all familiar with Disston's nearby company town in Tacony, Pennsylvania. Disston was not nearly as well publicized as Pullman, and though the name "Disston" had become a household name in relation to saws, it was not famous as a company town. Further investigation into any possible historic connections between the Disstons and the Roeblings would be interesting given the close proximity and striking similarities between their towns.

Preservation Efforts

Examination of the current situation and preservation efforts taking place in Roebling may offer some insight regarding future preservation efforts in Disston. Roebling was designated as an Historic District on the State Register of Historic Places in 1976 and the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Much like Disston, the statement of significance centers around Roebling's identity as a company town. However, the district only includes the residential

33 Silcox, 9 and Moore.



Fig. 2.3.15: Main Gate in Roebing. *Source: www.RoebingMuseum.org.*

section of the town, excluding the majority of the industrial buildings, many of which were still being utilized at the time of designation. The National Register nomination form includes an excellent breakdown of the typologies of residential buildings in Roebing, and may serve as an example for future districting efforts in Disston.

Today, the Main Gate between the residential area and former industrial site is under renovation to become the Roebing Museum, slated to open next year (Fig. 2.3.15). This 7,500 square foot museum will showcase Roebing's history with exhibits and educational lectures. The renovation is funded by \$6.1 million from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as part of its cleanup of the 240 acre Superfund site that was previously the Roebing plant. Unfortunately, under the EPA's cleanup, most of the industrial area has been razed due to hazardous materials and contaminants (refer to previous aerial photograph). Asbestos abatement in the buildings was completed in 1999, and between then and March 2008, 35 industrial buildings were demolished. The site is now mainly cleared and awaiting redevelopment, for which a reuse assessment was completed in 2002.³⁴

Sarah Van Domelen

34 United States Environmental Protection Agency. "Roebing Steel Co., New Jersey." Dated 3 Mar 2008. Accessed 25 Nov 2008. <<http://www.epa.gov/region02/superfund/npl/0200439c.pdf>>.

Evolutionary Mapping

To understand the history of settlement and development in Tacony, and Historic Disston in particular, the Studio examined historic accounts, maps, city atlases and aerial photographs of the area. Using these sources as a foundation, an evolutionary timeline was created from pre-settlement to current-day. An in-depth evolutionary mapping survey was also undertaken to better understand the growth of the Historic Disston area from Henry Disston's purchase to 2008.

Overall Settlement of Greater Tacony

Pre-Settlement – Before 1630

The earliest inhabitants of the area were the Lenni Lenape Indians, the original people of the mid-Atlantic area. The tribe's wide geographic area ranged from present day New York to Delaware, including along the Delaware River Valley. The greater Tacony area was then called "Tawacawonick," Lenape for wilderness or uninhabited land.¹ This area was bounded by the Delaware River and several creeks and waterways included in its watershed: the Wissinoming Creek to the northeast, the Frankford Creek to the south and Little Tacony Creek to the west.

Early Settlement – c. 1630-1800

In 1638 Swedish settlers began moving into the area, establishing small agricultural and livestock holdings. Living in peace with the Lenni Lenape, the Swedes became farmers, furriers and artisans. They also took advantage of the many natural waterways in the Delaware River watershed to establish small milling operations. Settling across the broader Tacony area, small communities began to form near present-day Frankford and Holmesburg.²

In 1682 William Penn, the English colonizer and founder of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia, negotiated a treaty with the Lenni Lenape effectively selling the land to the English and moving the Lenni Lenape further west.

By the mid 1700s, most of the land had been cleared for farming or to provide resources for the growing city of Philadelphia. The area

1 Latarola, Louis M., and Lynn-Carmela T. Latarola. Lower Northeast Philadelphia. Grand Rapids: Arcadia, 2005.

2 Ibid.

along the Delaware River was altered for the creation of docks for easy transportation and commerce. Milling continued across the area, although present-day Tacony remained relatively unsettled.³

Growth of Industrialization – c. 1800-1872^{4,5,6,7}

The growth of Philadelphia and industrialization brought increased and improved transportation systems along the northern Delaware Riverfront. Roads were built along key travel corridors parallel to the river and connecting Tacony to Frankford.

By the late 1830s railroad tracks were laid in place for the Philadelphia and Trenton Railroads leading into Philadelphia.

In 1846, the Philadelphia and Trenton Railroad was granted a permission to operate rail service, but denied permission to enter into Philadelphia. Instead, Tacony became the terminus of the line. In the years following, a series of gridded streets were laid out between the river and the rail tracks, with several connecting arteries running to Frankford and Philadelphia. New local business also spawned from this development, including several hotels and taverns. Still, the bulk of the land remained in the hands of select, wealthy landholders who used the area as a vacation spot.⁸

Henry Disston – 1872-1955^{9,10,11,12,13,14,15}

The establishment of the railroad terminus, the presence of the river docks and the relatively open land holdings made the Tacony area

3 Iatarola, Louis M., and Lynn-Carmela T. Latarola. Lower Northeast Philadelphia. Grand Rapids: Arcadia, 2005.

4 “Map of Philadelphia.” Map. Map of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, PA: John Hills, 1809.

5 “Map of the County of Philadelphia.” Map. Map of the County of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, PA: Charles Ellet, Jr., 1839.

6 “Barne’s New Map of the Consolidated City of Philadelphia.” Barne’s New Map of the Consolidated City of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, PA: R.L. Barnes, 1855.

7 “Smedley’s Atlas of the City of Philadelphia.” Map. Smedley’s Atlas of the City of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1862.

8 Iatarola, Louis M., and Lynn-Carmela T. Latarola. Lower Northeast Philadelphia. Grand Rapids: Arcadia, 2005.

9 “Hexamer Survey of Industrial Buildings in Philadelphia.” Map. Hexamer Survey of Industrial Buildings in Philadelphia. Philadelphia, PA: E. Hexamer, 1875.

10 “City Atlas of Philadelphia by Wards Complete in Seven Volumes.” Map. City Atlas of Philadelphia by Wards Complete in Seven Volumes. Vol. 3. Philadelphia, PA: G.M. Hopkins, 1876.

attractive to Henry Disston. In 1872 Disston purchased 390 acres of land surrounding the railroad terminus, spanning from the river east to Little Wissinoming Creek. Construction first began on the saw plant site near the river in 1872. Home construction to support the anticipated workforce began four years later.¹⁶

Although he did not employ a formal planner, Disston's hand and vision can be seen through the design and organization of the community he created. As he began to layout the residential community, he expanded along the grid provided by the existing streetlines west of the railroad tracks. Disston's tracts spanned from Magee Street on the south, Torresdale Avenue on the west, Princeton Street on the north and the riverfront on the east. Running directly through the middle and connecting to the saw plant, Longshore Avenue became the central commercial and cultural corridor for the community.

Disston's vision also extended to residential design, with housing lots planned for maximum light and natural air. He also called for the creation of several community and cultural buildings, many of which still exist, including the Tacony Music Hall, the Tacony Savings Fund, a library, several churches and schools. In addition, Disston called for a community park which served as a verdant divider between the industrial and residential areas.

Increased industrial growth along the river and improvements in transportation brought new investment to Tacony in the 1890s. As the businesses expanded, the increased workforce drove the demand for rapid growth in housing stock, expanded streets, more churches

11 "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd and 35th Wards." Map. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd and 35th Wards. Philadelphia, PA: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1894.

12 "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd and 35th Wards." Map. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd and 35th Wards. Philadelphia, PA: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1910.

13 "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 25th and 41st Wards." Map. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 25th and 41st Wards. Philadelphia, PA: G.W. Bromley, 1920.

14 "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 25th and 41st Wards." Map. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 25th and 41st Wards." Map. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 25th and 41st Wards." Philadelphia, PA: G.W. Bromley, 1929.

15 "Atlas of Greater Northeast Philadelphia, Penna." Atlas of Greater Northeast Philadelphia, Penna. Vol. 6. Philadelphia, PA: Franklin Survey Company, 1954.

16 Silcox, Harry C. *A Place to Live and Work : The Henry Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia*. New York: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994.

and new commercial investment. This growth continued through the early twentieth century with the introduction of trolley cars, the Reading Railroad, an elevated train into Philadelphia and the opening of the Tacony-Palmyra bridge.

1955-Present Day

Today, much of the historic neighborhood stemming from Disston's development remains intact. Although the Disston plant was sold in 1955, almost all of the housing stock built by Disston remains along with most of the community and cultural institutions. Disston Park still serves as a natural border between the industrial and residential sites. The industrial site retains several large tracts of historic fabric and is still zoned for industrial use.

The bulk of the changes to the neighborhood have occurred due to mass transportation and highway access into and out of Philadelphia. The construction of I-95 along the route of the old Philadelphia and Trenton Railway called for the demolition of building stock and further divides the residential area from the industrial site. The commercial heart of Tacony has also shifted from Longshore Avenue to Torresdale Avenue.

In Depth Evolutionary Mapping of the Disston Estate

The following series of evolutionary maps traces the development of the Disston estate from 1876 through the present day.

The studio team developed a boundary for the Historic Disston Estate that is used for the remainder of this report. This boundary was developed using a methodology that included analysis of historic atlases, fire insurance maps, additional archival survey maps, and observation on the ground to determine the extent of the historic estate. The parameters of the boundary are the land holdings of the original Henry Disston Estate, excluding most of the discontinuous Mary Disston parcels, yet including the Mary Disston parcel between Unruh and Magee Avenues from the Delaware River on the east to the railroad tracks to the west. The western edge of the district originally followed a stream that has since been culvertized. The historic stream alignment was overlaid onto the current map of the area and the boundary was determined based on the age of the buildings on each block near the creek.

Thus the boundaries of Historic Disston are:

- Eastern boundary: The Delaware River
- Southern boundary: Magee Avenue from the river to the mid block between Jackson and Gillespie Streets
- Western boundary: From the mid block of Jackson and Gillespie Streets on Magee Avenue north to Knorr Street, a jog west to the intersection of Knorr and Cottage Streets, then north to the intersection of Cottage and Tyson Streets
- Northern boundary: From the intersection of Cottage and Tyson Streets east to the mid block of Torresdale Avenue and Marsden Street, then heading north to Princeton Avenue, then east past Keystone Street to the intersection of Princeton Avenue and the location of a former rail spur that curves southeast to the river

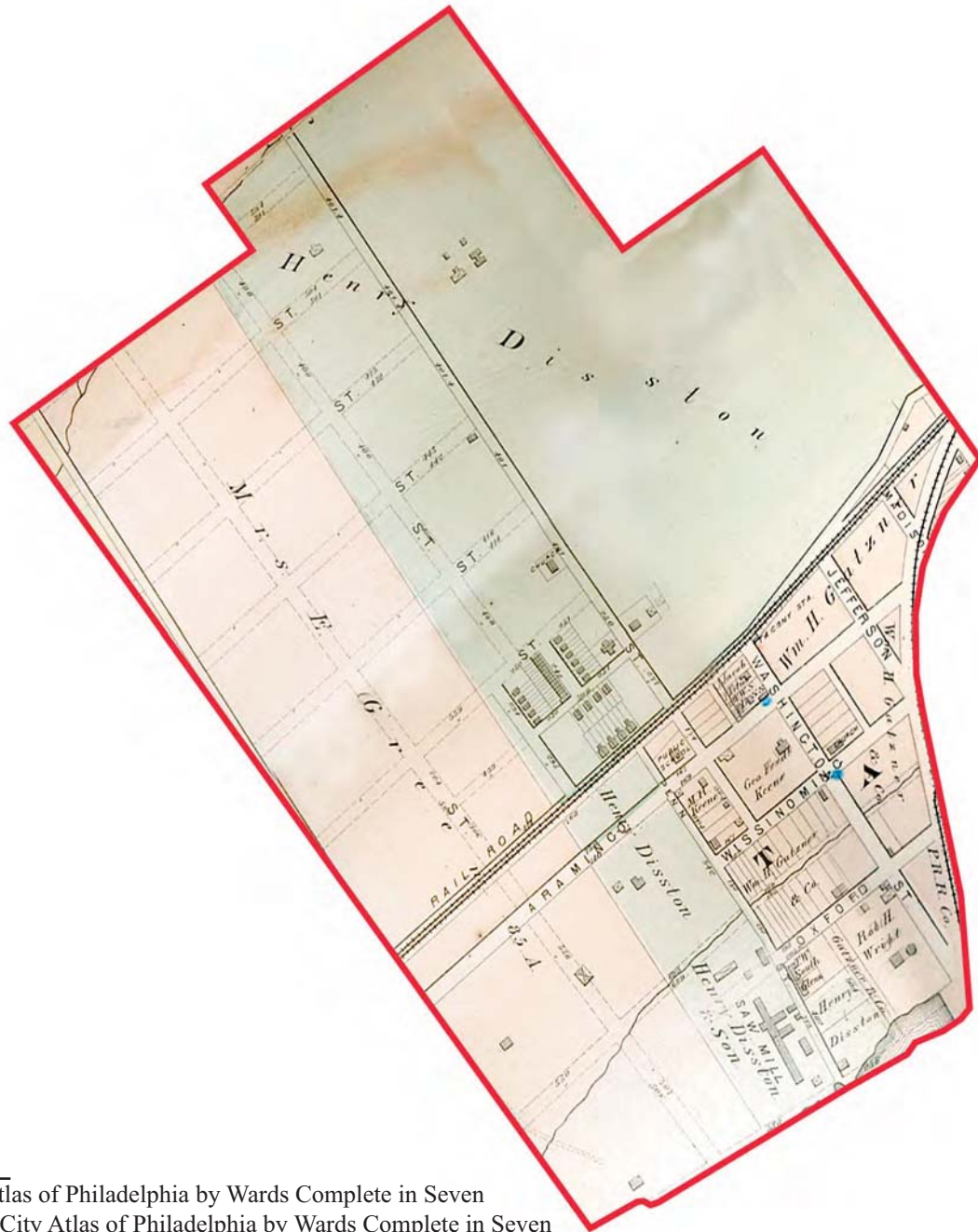
The project used base photomontage maps created from city atlases accessed at the Free Library of Philadelphia and the Tacony Historical Society. Current city of Philadelphia GIS shapefiles from 2008 were also used to help show the growth and expansion of Disston's company town from its beginnings in 1872 to the present day.

Evolutionary Maps

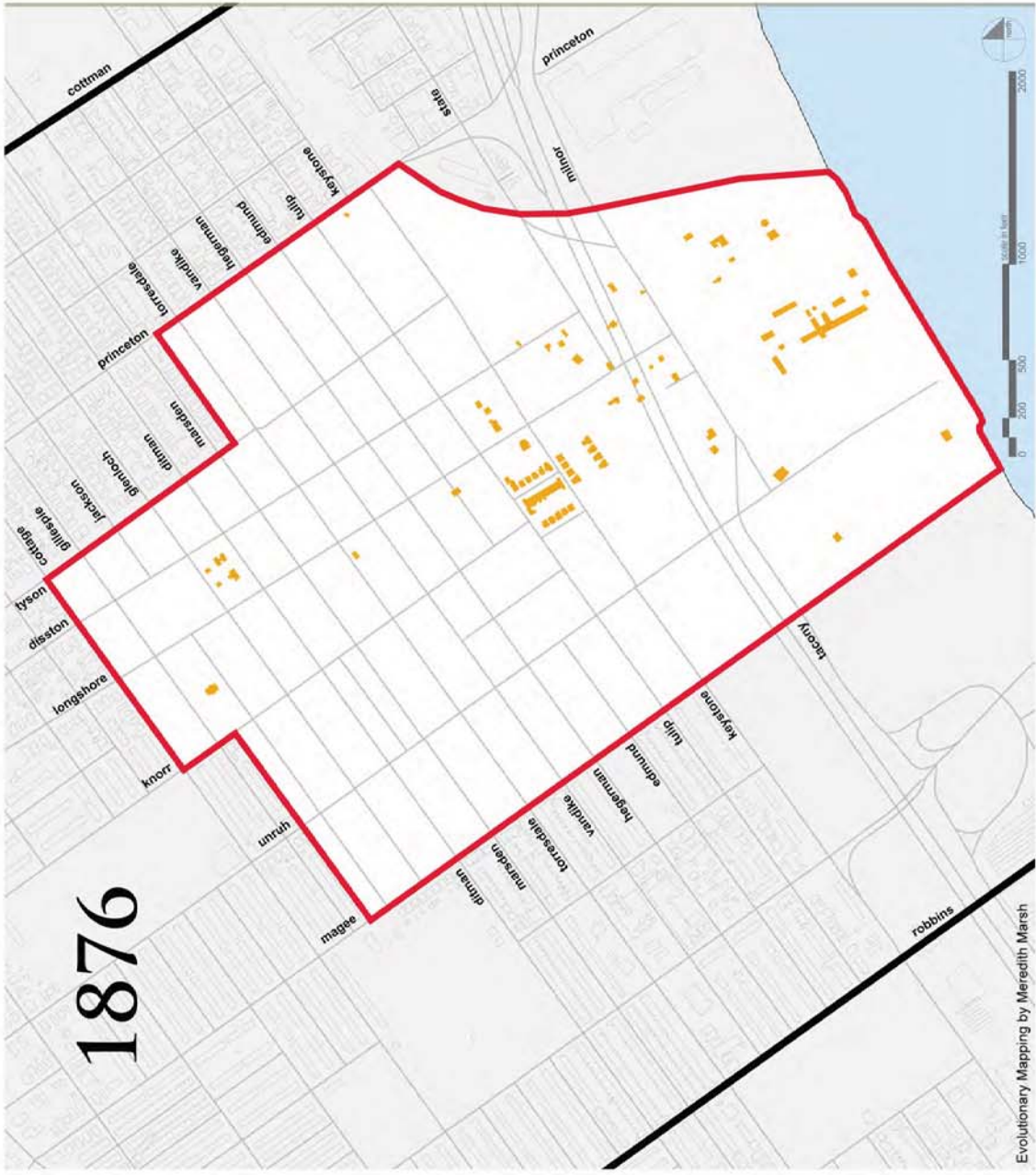
1876¹⁷

In the early years of Disston & Sons Keystone Saw Works, the industrial area spanning from the Delaware River to the railroad tracks is already beginning to take shape. A small, dense residential settlement has started in the central portion of the site between Keystone and Tulip Streets, and spreads into Disston Park to the east.

1894¹⁸



¹⁷ “City Atlas of Philadelphia by Wards Complete in Seven Volumes.” Map. City Atlas of Philadelphia by Wards Complete in Seven Volumes. Vol. 3. Philadelphia, PA: G.M. Hopkins, 1876.



Evolutionary Map

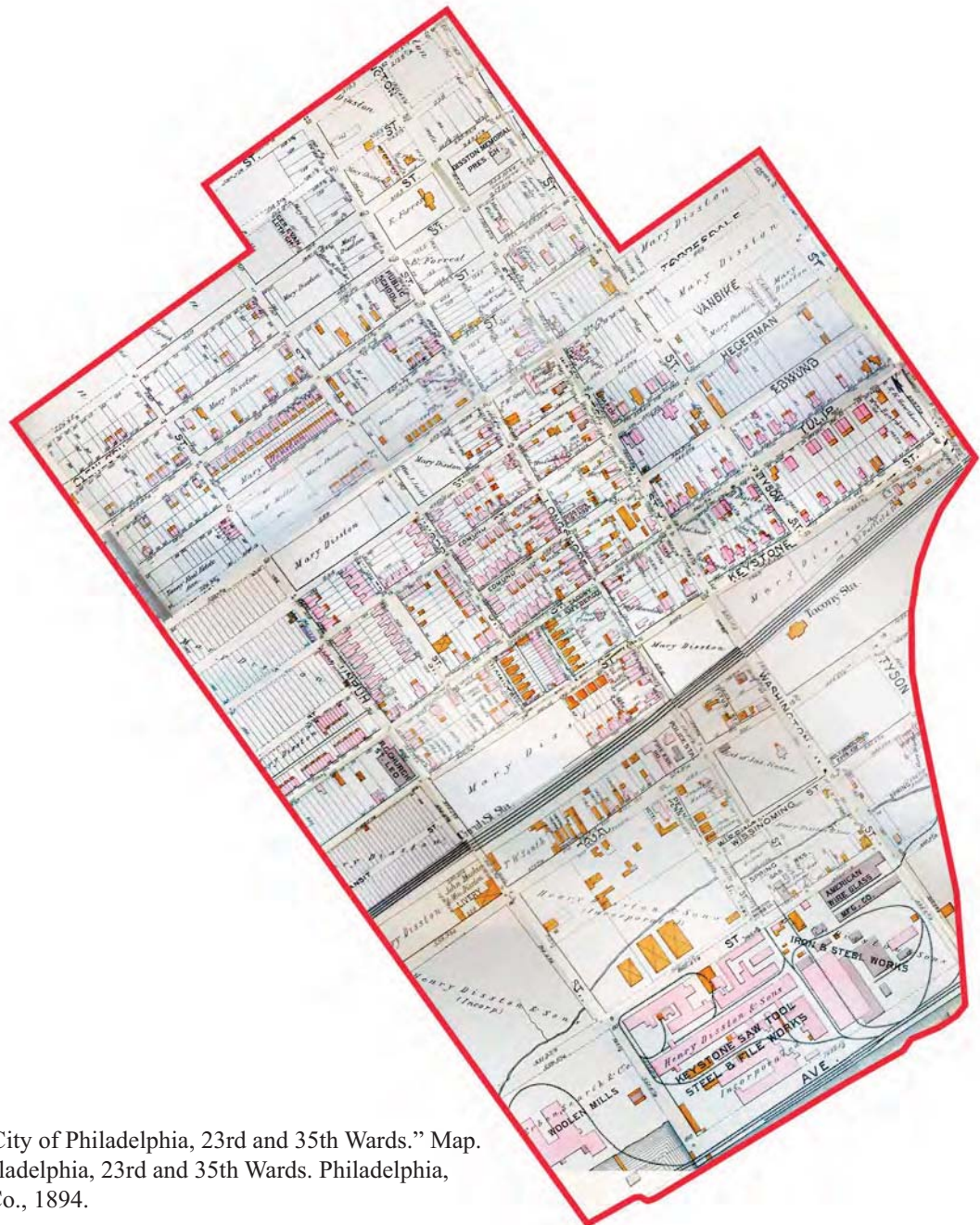
buildings dating from:

Orange	up to 1876
Red	1877-1894
Purple	1895-1910
Blue	1911-1954
Green	1955-2008

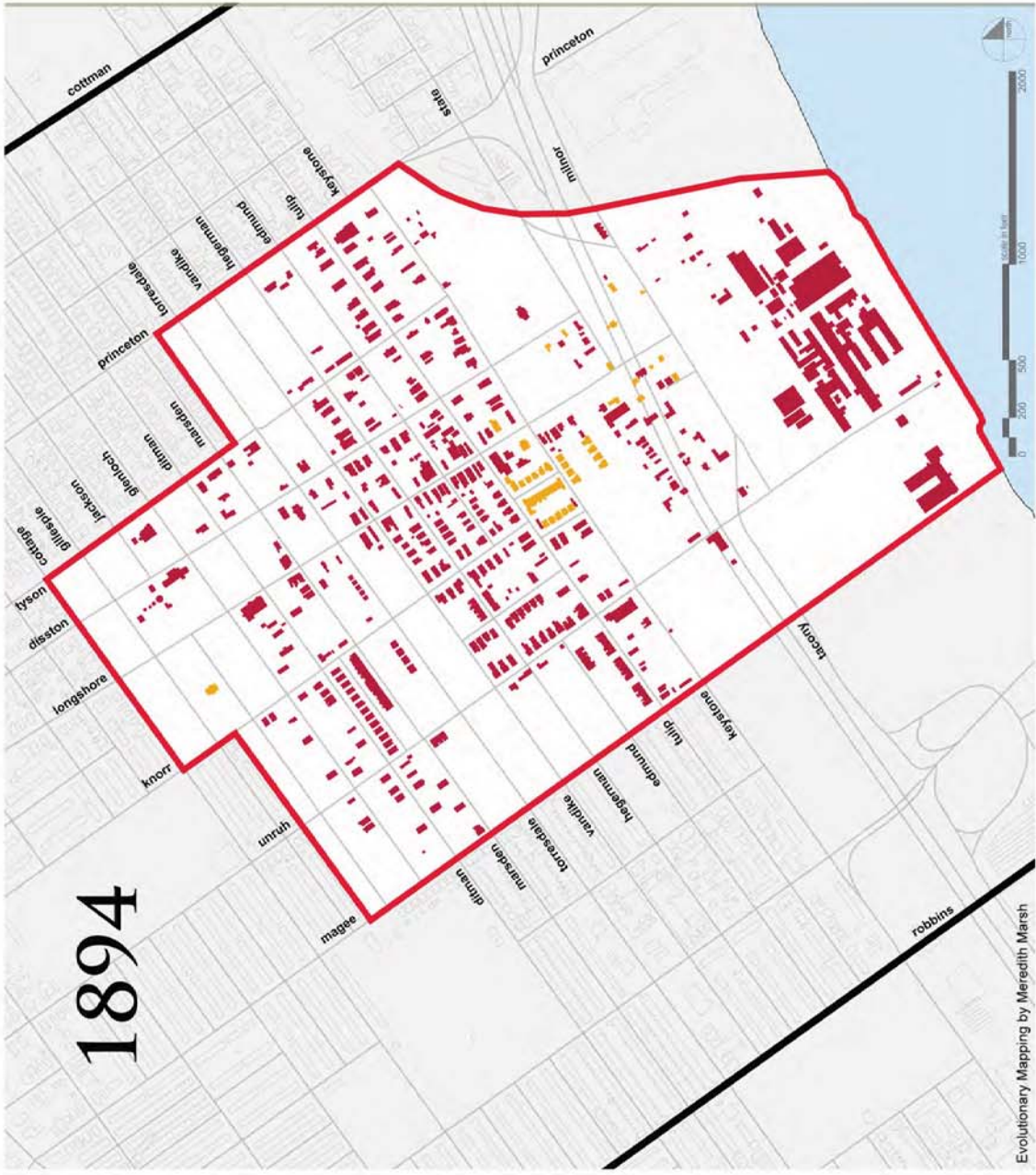
— historic disston
— tacony boundary

By 1894, the company town is now fully discernible in the built fabric of the Disston estate. The residential portion is growing into a dense area predominantly located between Vandike and Keystone Streets. Residential units are still located in the park area east of Keystone Street. The industrial portion of the site has expanded substantially in order to accommodate the needs of the growing company. Notice that while Longshore Avenue is densely built up with commercial buildings facing towards the street, there is still very little development along Torresdale Avenue.

1910¹⁹



18 "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd and 35th Wards." Map. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd and 35th Wards. Philadelphia, PA: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1894.



1894

Evolutionary Map

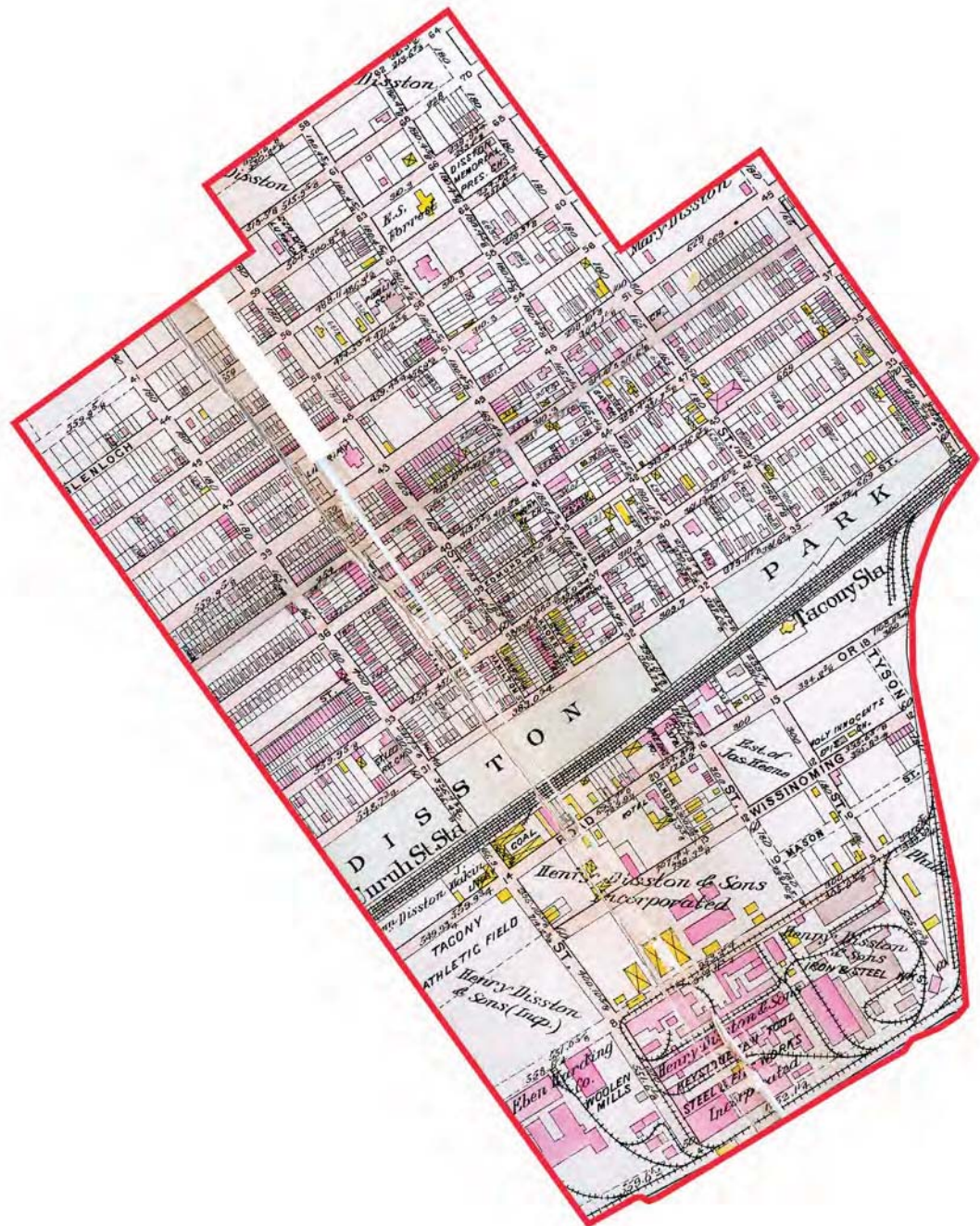
buildings dating from:

- up to 1876
- 1877-1894
- 1895-1910
- 1911-1954
- 1955-2008

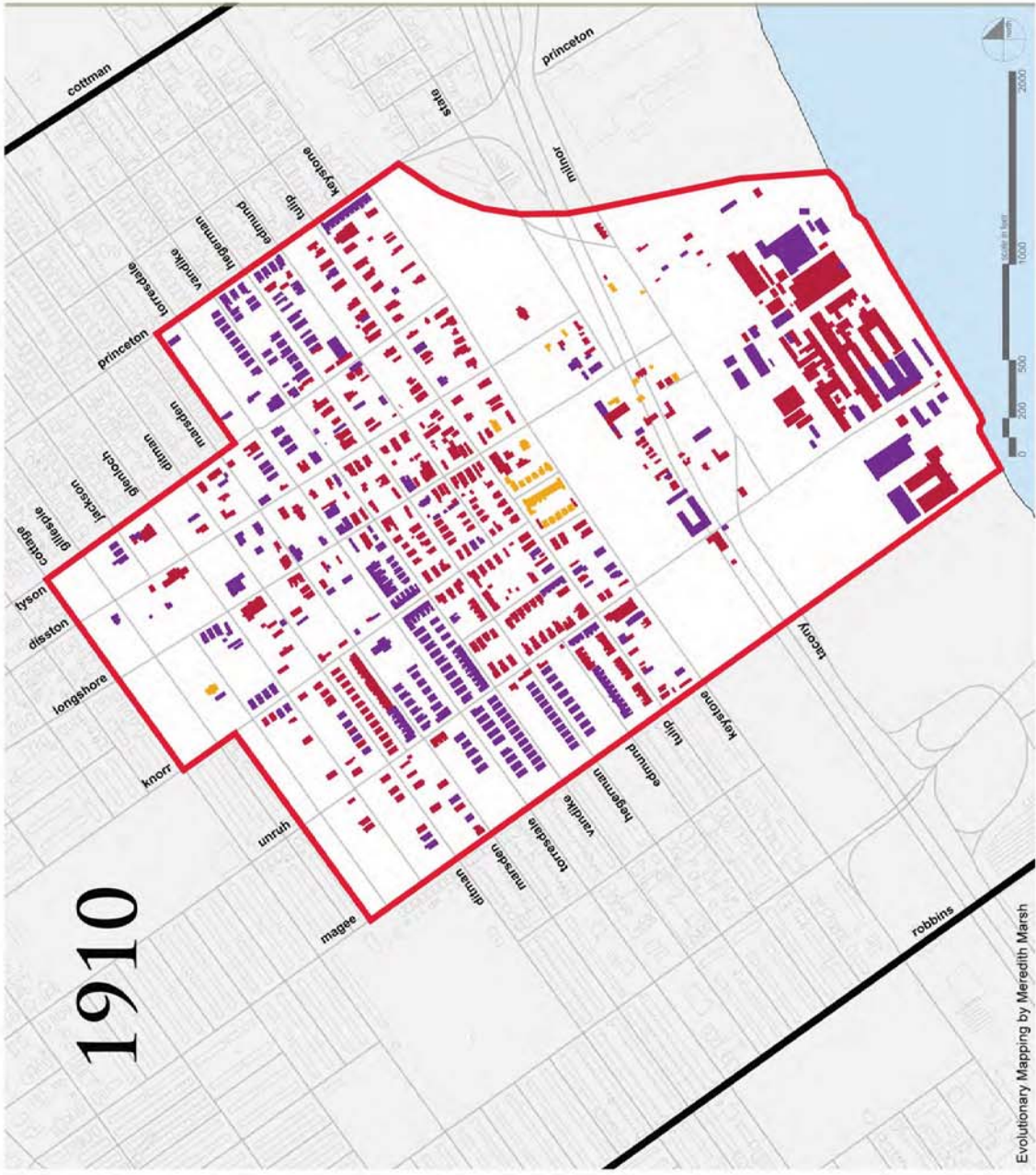
historic disston
tacony boundary

By the early 20th century the residential area is even denser, and now stretches from Torresdale Avenue to Keystone Street. Torresdale Avenue is becoming more densely developed, but only near the edges of the estate. The buildings previously located within Disston Park have now been removed. Near the river, the industrial area continues to expand.

1954²⁰



19 "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd and 35th Wards." Map. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd and 35th Wards. Philadelphia, PA: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1910.



1910

Evolutionary Map

buildings dating from:

- up to 1876
- 1877-1894
- 1895-1910
- 1911-1954
- 1955-2008

historic disston
tacony boundary

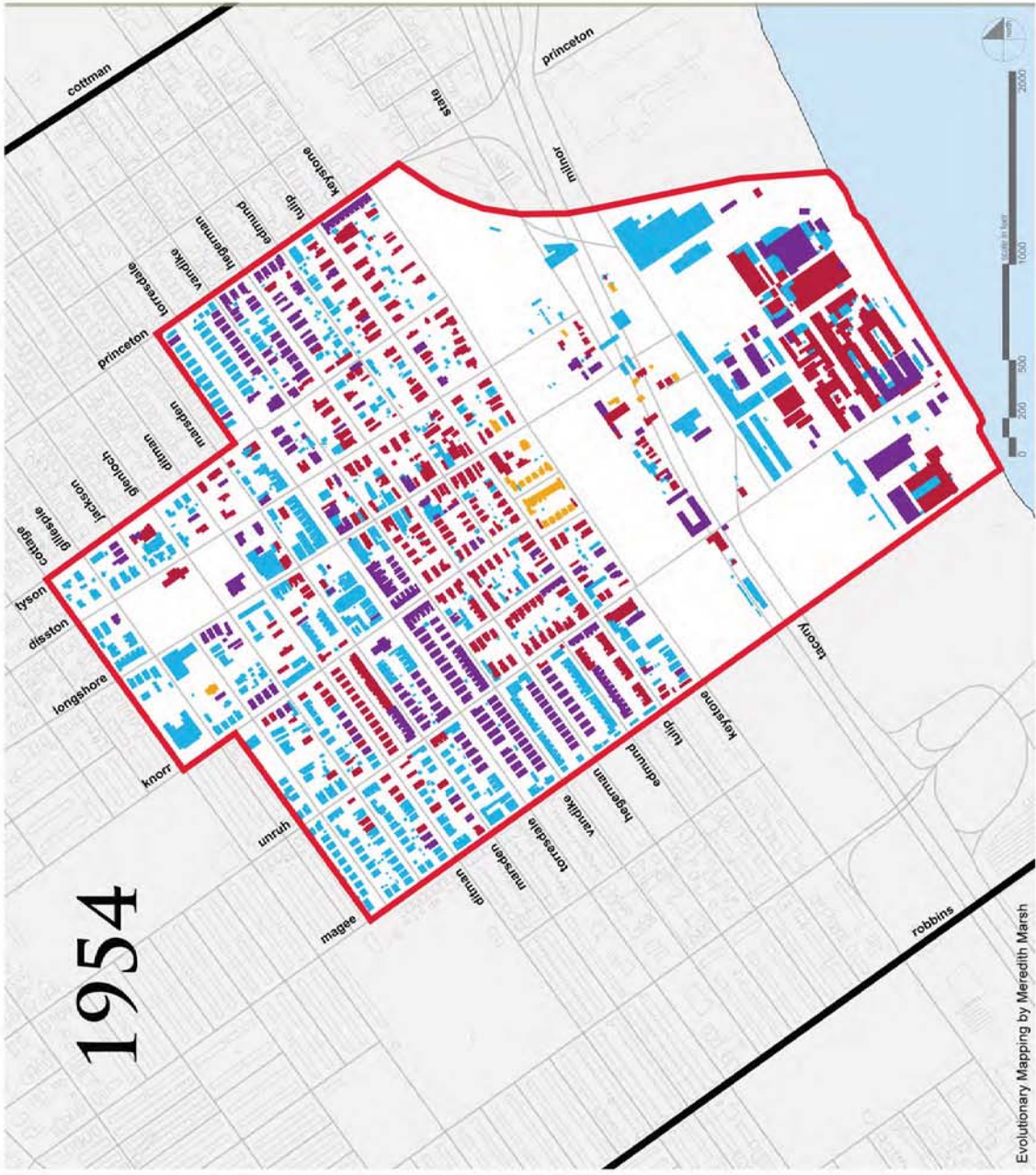
Evolutionary Mapping by Meredith Marsh

The Disston estate is now fully built out, and the shift from Longshore Avenue to Torresdale Avenue is evident in the densely built fabric along Torresdale. The largest industrial buildings now extend as far west as Milnor Street. The residential area grows even denser, and the introduction of detached garages and gas stations is now becoming more prevalent.

2008^{21,22}



20 “Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 25th and 41st Wards.” Map. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 25th and 41st Wards. Philadelphia, PA: G.W. Bromley, 1920.



1954

Evolutionary Map

buildings dating from:

- up to 1876
- 1877-1894
- 1895-1910
- 1911-1954
- 1955-2008

historic disston
tacony boundary

Evolutionary Mapping by Meredith Marsh

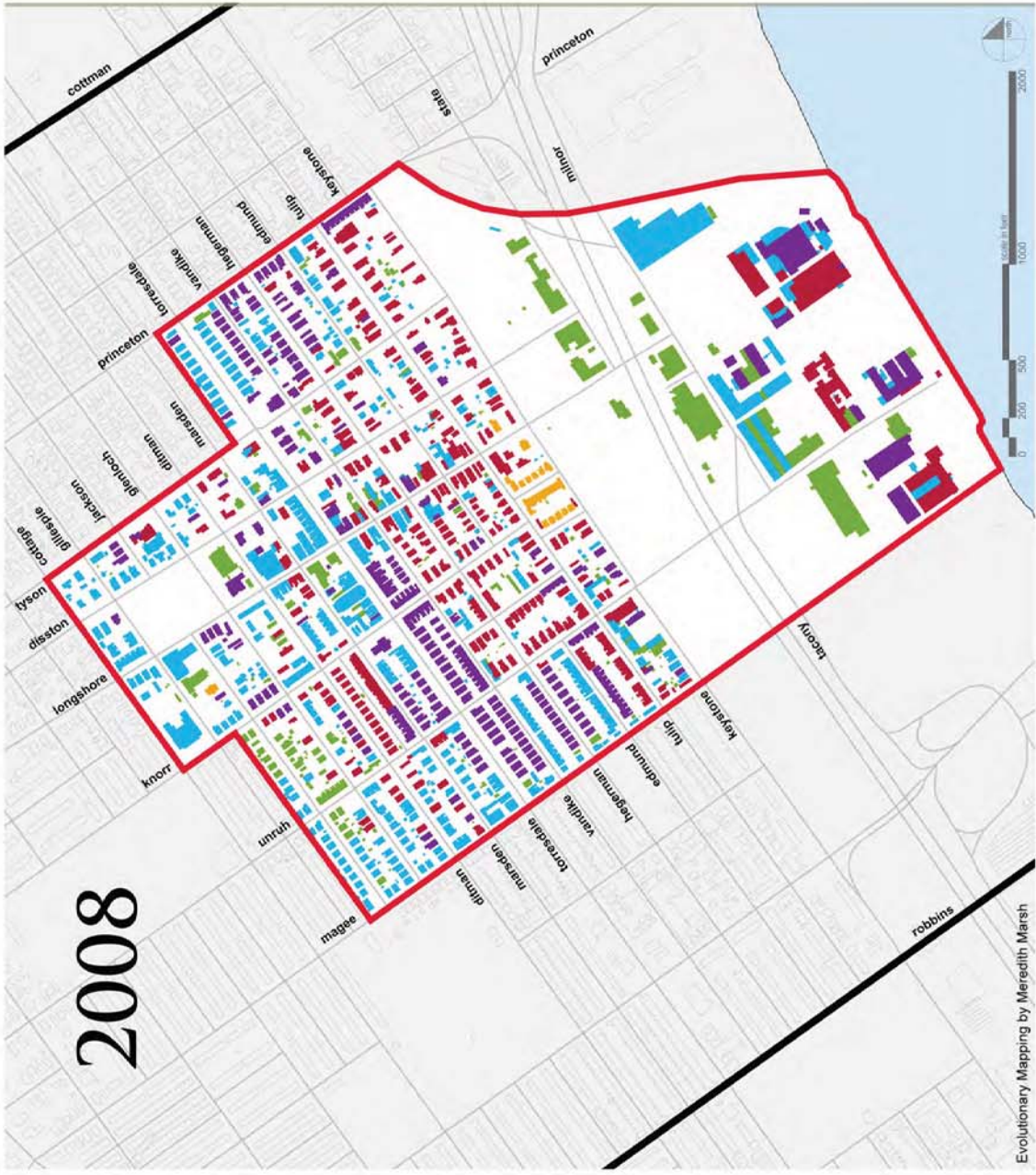
The most substantial changes occurring from the mid-twentieth century to the present day includes extensive demolition in the industrial area following the sale of the Disston company in 1955, and further clearing in this area to make way for I-95. The rest of the site west of Keystone Street is relatively unchanged during this period. While some new construction does occur, there is only a minor amount of demolition.

Demolition Maps



21 "Windows Live Earth." Windows Live Earth. 1 Oct. 2008.
<<http://maps.live.com>>.

22 Philadelphia Building Survey, Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access (PASDA). <http://www.pasda.psu.edu/>.



These maps can also be examined in reverse, showing the rate of demolition occurring between each period of time. This shows both how the Disston Saw Works evolved and, later, what historic fabric has been lost.

1894

The most substantial demolition up until 1894 occurs in the industrial area, as the expansion of the saw works and the growth of the company happens in this portion of the Disston estate near the Delaware River.

1910

Relatively minor demolition occurs during the period from 1895 to 1910. Additional growth in the industrial area and the shift from Longshore to Torresdale Avenues is responsible for the majority of demolition that occurs during this period.

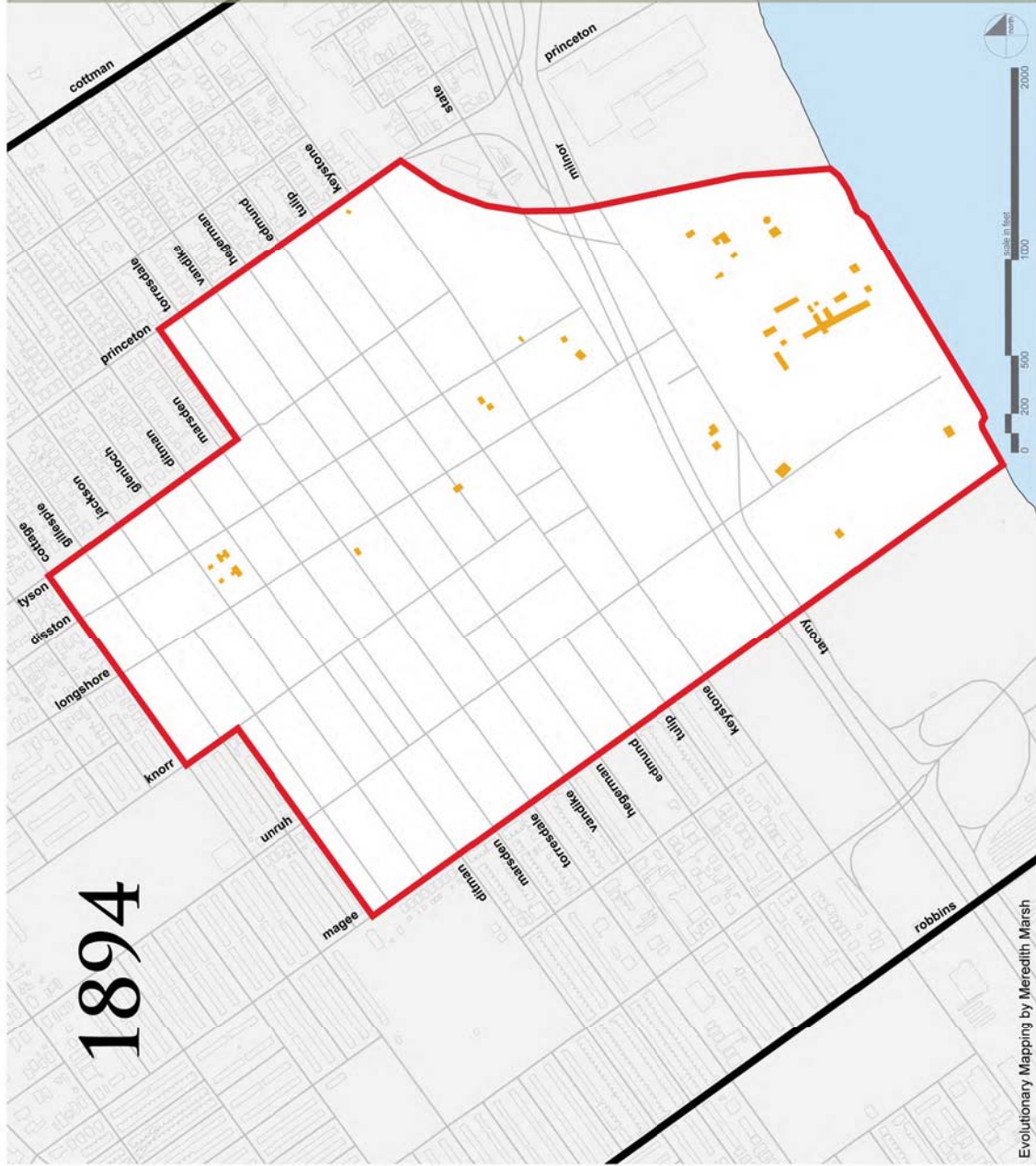
1954

Demolition taking place up through mid-century occurs mostly within the residential area, as apartment buildings and newer homes are introduced. The industrial area continues to develop, yet suffers relatively little demolition.

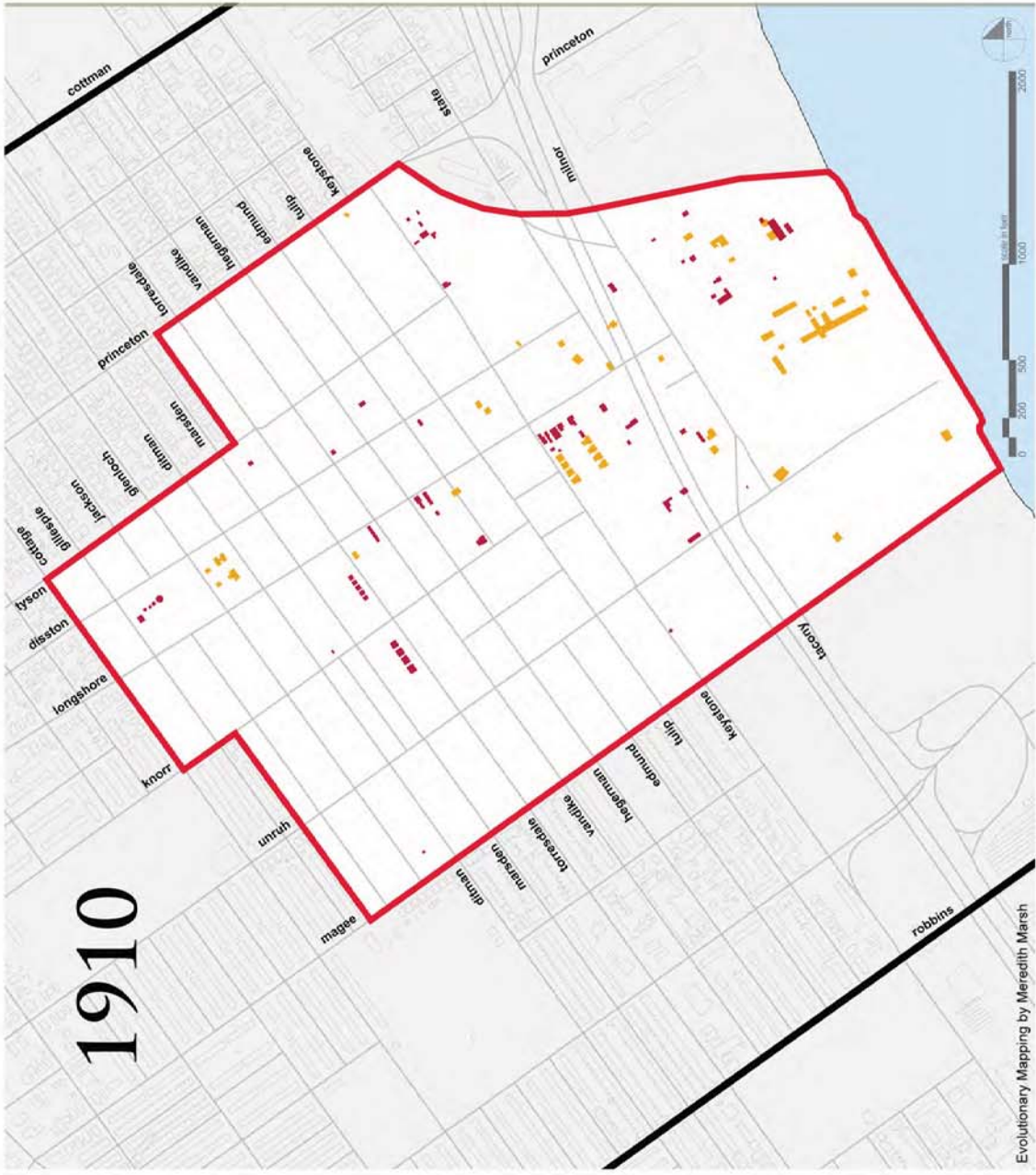
2008

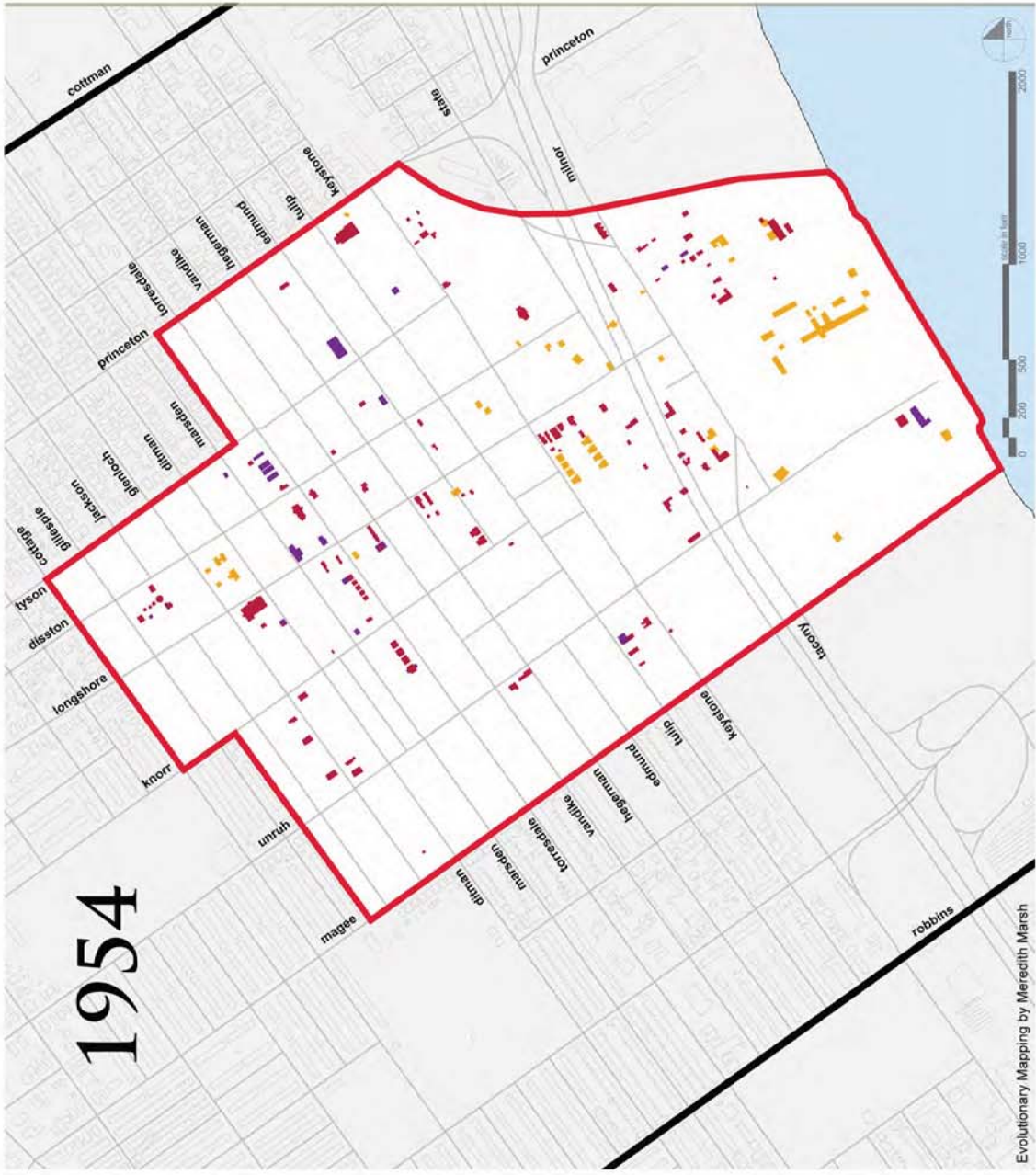
The majority of change in the residential area occurs with the removal of outbuildings such as detached garages and involves little alteration to larger structures such as houses and apartment buildings. The industrial area suffers heavy losses during this period due to the closure of the company in 1955 and construction of I-95 near the railroad tracks.

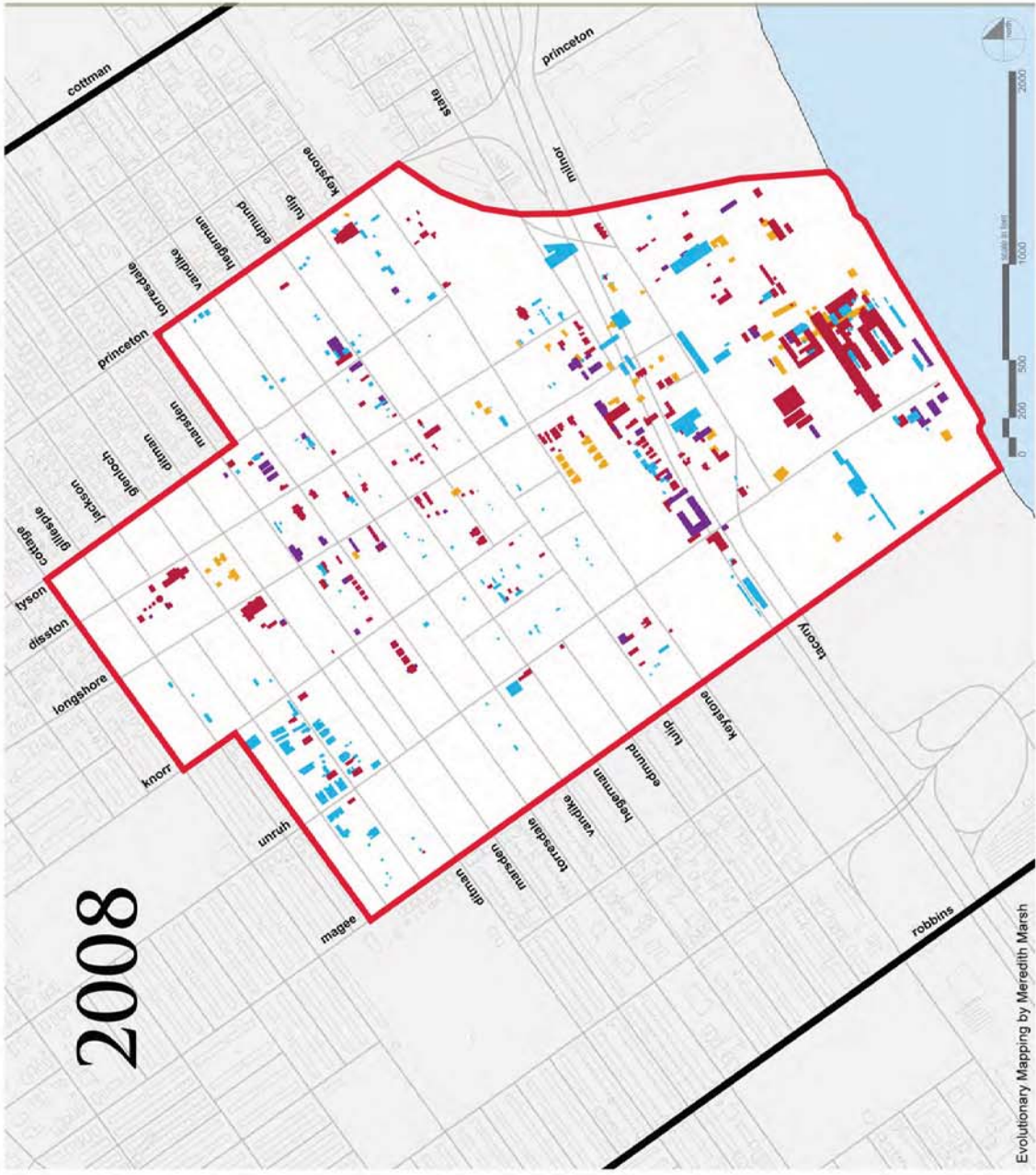
Meredith Marsh & Taryn D'Ambrogi



Evolutionary Mapping by Meredith Marsh







2008

Demolition Map

buildings dating from:

- up to 1876
- 1877-1894
- 1895-1910
- 1911-1954
- 1955-2008

historic disston
tacony boundary