

SECTION FOUR



**I want to**

**LEARN AND SHARE THE HISTORY**

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**of my neighborhood.**



## BACKGROUND

Every neighborhood has a history. It may not seem like it if your community was built more recently—even in the last 50 years!—but the wonderful thing about history is that it gets embedded in everything. There are many stories to tell about every place, old or new(er), different perspectives to each story, and various ways to share those stories. If you believe that we can learn a lot from how we tell our history, and what it means to have inherited a place, then this section of the toolkit will help to identify different ways to learn and share your neighborhood’s history.

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One definitive way to preserve history is to designate a building (or buildings) as historic—nominating them to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places and/or the National Register of Historic Places. This toolkit includes information about that approach (see pages 12-13) and what it means for building owners and community members. But designation is not the only way to reveal and share a neighborhood’s history (or, more accurately, histories), and this section explores additional ways to do so, bridging ages and audiences alike.



## ASK AND ANSWER

### What do you mean when you say “historic”?

#### That depends!

If you’re wondering about the legal definition of “historic”—in other words, how old does something have to be in order to be designated—then the general guideline (with some exceptions) is 50 years old. That means that, as this toolkit is being prepared in 2018, buildings that were constructed in 1968 or earlier are considered eligible for the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places and the National Register of Historic

Places. That may seem recent, but when you think about all the significant things that happened in our country in 1968, it’s an important reminder that the 50-year threshold allows us to commemorate our recent history, too, and the places where that history happens.

That said, history is obviously not just an official legal definition. So when we say “older” or “historic” in this toolkit, we are referring to any of the places in your community that matter to you and have value in your neighborhood.

### Who puts up those blue markers that I see on the sidewalk?

The blue markers with yellow text are part of the Pennsylvania Historical Marker Program, which is administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), a state agency. (There are many



imitations of these plaques around the city using other colors, but the blue and yellow ones are the official state markers.) More than 2,000 of these aluminum signs are posted around the state to commemorate people, places, events, and innovations that have affected the lives of Pennsylvanians. Anyone can nominate a marker to be part of the program (although you may choose to hire a professional historian), and PHMC will review the nomination. The individual or community organization that submits the nomination must pay for the cost of installation, but PHMC then maintains the sign once it is installed. You can find out more about the program on PHMC's website.

### **Pennsylvania Historical Marker Program**

[phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Historical-Markers/Pages/default.aspx](http://phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Historical-Markers/Pages/default.aspx)



## **Who puts up the plaques on certain buildings that says they are historic?**

If the plaque is oval in shape and says “Certified – Philadelphia Historical Commission,” then it indicates that the property has been officially designated on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Owners of buildings or sites listed on the Philadelphia Register can commemorate the significance of their property by purchasing a cast metal plaque from the Philadelphia Historical Commission. More information about the plaque program is available on the Philadelphia Historical Commission's website.

### **Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Plaque Program**

[phila.gov/historical/register/Pages/plaqueprogram.aspx](http://phila.gov/historical/register/Pages/plaqueprogram.aspx)

If the plaque is on a building in the University City neighborhood and features a construction date, it is likely part of the University City Historical Society's date marker program.

### **University City Historical Society**

[ucls.net/#marker-info](https://ucls.net/#marker-info)

*As of today, buildings that were constructed in 1968 or earlier are considered eligible for historic designation!*



## TRY IT OUT

Two activity options for all community members, young and old(er)

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**1**

### INTERVIEW A LONG-TIME NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENT.

- 1** Ask them how long they lived there?
- 2** How has the neighborhood changed over time?
- 3** What are some positive or challenging elements to share?

→

2

## CREATE A NEIGHBORHOOD WALKING TOUR OR SCAVENGER HUNT.

Map out a path through your neighborhood that hits all your favorite local places. If a newcomer visited your community, what should they make sure to see? Local food spots? A favorite local building? The best gardens or window boxes in the area? A place someone famous once visited?

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Once you have an idea for your route, grab some neighbors (young and old) and take them on a walk! (What places matter to them along the route?) Or keep the route a secret! Hide clues, and take them on a history mystery.

3

## VISIT SOME OF THE CITY'S ONLINE VAULTS OF HISTORIC IMAGES AND DOCUMENTS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND VISUALIZE ITS HISTORY.

### **PhillyHistory.com**

PhillyHistory.com catalogues the photographs of the Department of Records. Images can be searched by location and/or keyword.

[phillyhistory.org/PhotoArchive/Home.aspx](http://phillyhistory.org/PhotoArchive/Home.aspx)

### **The Temple Urban Archives**

The Temple Urban Archives contain media collections and oral histories on a variety of topics. Are there any that are related to your neighborhood?

[library.temple.edu/scrc/urban-archives](http://library.temple.edu/scrc/urban-archives)

### **The Free Library of Philadelphia**

The Free Library of Philadelphia has a collection of historical images of all themes and time periods.

[freelibrary.org/digital/collection/historical-images-of-philadelphia](http://freelibrary.org/digital/collection/historical-images-of-philadelphia)

### **PhilaGeoHistory**

PhilaGeoHistory features thousands of old maps, property atlases, city directories, and other resources. You can browse within resources, or search by address.

[PhilaGeoHistory.org](http://PhilaGeoHistory.org)



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## TAKE ACTION

### Ask the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia to lead a workshop during a community meeting

Since 2005, the Preservation Alliance's Neighborhood Preservation program has been helping Philadelphia residents and community leaders discover and promote their neighborhood history by identifying landmarks and architectural characteristics that give their neighborhood its own unique sense of place.

#### Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

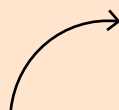
[preservationalliance.com/explore-philadelphia/philadelphia-neighborhoods](http://preservationalliance.com/explore-philadelphia/philadelphia-neighborhoods)

### Lead a Jane's Walk

Jane's Walks (named for the famous writer, urbanist, and activist Jane Jacobs) are free walking tours held around the world each May. Jane's Walks are volunteer, citizen-led walking tours that encourage people to observe, reflect, share, question, and re-imagine the places in which they live, work, and play. Organize a Jane's Walk in your own neighborhood, and promote it via Jane's Walk Philadelphia.

#### Jane's Walk Philadelphia

[janeswalk.org/united-states/philadelphia-pa](http://janeswalk.org/united-states/philadelphia-pa)



Another option is to lead a walk at any time!

### Nominate a place in your neighborhood for a Pennsylvania Historical Marker

Have you ever noticed a blue sign with yellow lettering and, in reading it, learned something new about a site? Those markers are part of the Pennsylvania Historical Marker Program, which is administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC). Read more about the program in the "Ask and Answer" part of this section, then do some research and apply for a marker yourself! (If you're not comfortable preparing the application on your own, you can hire a local historian to write and submit it.)

#### Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Pennsylvania Historical Marker Nominations

[phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Historical-Markers/Pages/Nominate.aspx](http://phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Historical-Markers/Pages/Nominate.aspx)



## Sign up for the class “Building Philadelphia: Architecture, History, and Politics,” hosted by the Center for Architecture and Design

This 10-part series explores how Philadelphia became the city it is today. It is presented each spring and is led by local architects, urban planners, archaeologists, and historians, who lead classes about the political, economic, and design trends that drove Philadelphia’s development. Dive deep with fellow interested historians, and learn more about how your neighborhood fits into the overall story of Philadelphia’s evolution.

**The Center for Architecture and Design’s Building Philadelphia: Architecture, History, and Politics**  
[philadelphiacfa.org/building-philadelphia-architecture-history-politics](http://philadelphiacfa.org/building-philadelphia-architecture-history-politics)



## Request a Mural

Talk to Mural Arts about creating a mural in your neighborhood to depict your community’s defining characteristics or stories of the past to share.

**Mural Arts**  
[muralarts.org](http://muralarts.org)

## Hire an artist or videographer to create a collection of neighborhood histories, speaking with residents (long-time and new, young and old!) about their experiences

Collections can take the shape of videos, drawings done by adults or kids, or art installations. Funding may be found for such storytelling projects by working with partners like the Knight Foundation and arts collectives like Mural Arts, Amber Arts, Asian Arts Initiative and Green Street Artists Cooperative (GSAC).

## Take part in one of the programs of the Philadelphia Archaeological Forum (PAF)

PAF is a nonprofit organization dedicated to learning and sharing the stories of Philadelphia’s archaeological past. Check out their programs and resources at the organization’s website.

[phillyarchaeology.net](http://phillyarchaeology.net)



## LEARN MORE

### For local historians

Scribe Video Center's Precious Places Community History Project is an oral history project that invites Philadelphians from across neighborhoods to document the buildings, public spaces, parks, landmarks, and other sites that hold important memories for communities. The project also teaches video production, so that the resulting work both depicts and was created by community members.

#### **Scribe Video Center's Precious Places Community History Project**

[scribe.org/precious-places-community-history-project-2018](https://scribe.org/precious-places-community-history-project-2018)

### For local archaeologists

The land under our feet was traveled by Indigenous peoples long before William Penn arrived, and has been changing for centuries. This means that this region is significant for its hidden histories below ground, in addition to any buildings and sites above ground. The Philadelphia Archaeological Forum is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection and preservation of archaeological resources in the City of Philadelphia.

#### **The Philadelphia Archaeological Forum**

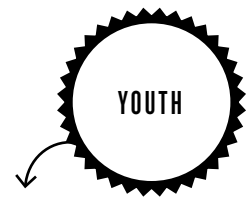
[phillyarchaeology.net](http://phillyarchaeology.net)

### For an example of a public history project

The Philadelphia Public History Truck is a prime example of how to share community-driven hidden histories on a hyper-local basis. The mobile museum—based out of a truck!—traveled from neighborhood to neighborhood, creating exhibitions and collecting oral histories. These oral histories are archived online.

#### **Philadelphia Public History Truck**

[phillyhistorytruck.wordpress.com](http://phillyhistorytruck.wordpress.com)



### For an example of a youth history program

Check out History Hunters Youth Reporter Program, a fully-subsidized field trip program for Philadelphia School District 4th and 5th graders. The program is based at Stenton, with several other historic sites and partners involved. The literacy-based program allows students to “hunt” for history by taking part in a variety of hands-on activities and experiences that bring history to life. As “investigative reporters” on assignment, students gather facts and sketches from their visits for follow-up writing in the classroom.

#### **History Hunters Youth Reporter Program**

[historyhunters.org](http://historyhunters.org)

## For examples of a neighborhood-based history/resources website

Here are two great examples of local history websites:

- 1) PoweltonVillage.org, which compiles research on the history of the Powelton Village neighborhood and resources for current residents and businesses; and
- 2) The West Philadelphia History Map, which pinpoints sites of historic significance by both time and topic.

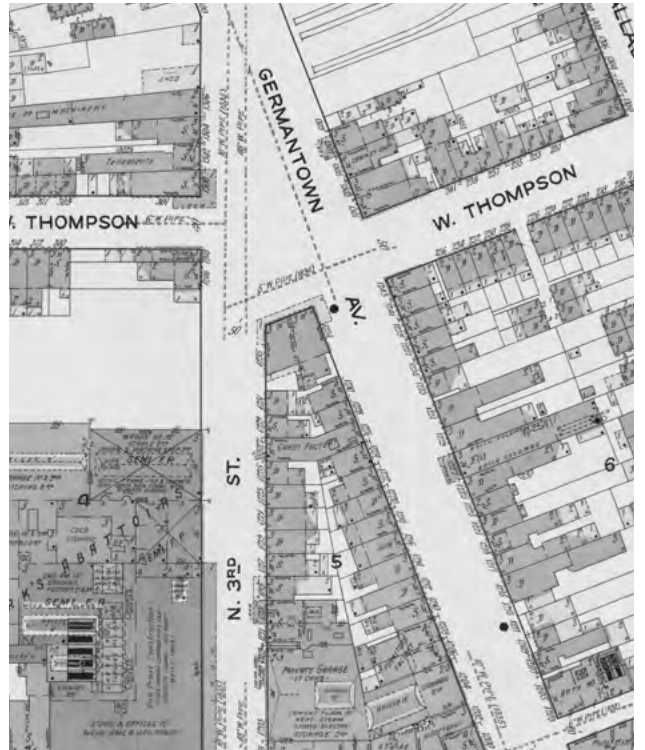
If you or a neighbor feel comfortable building a website (there are lots of platforms that keep things simple!), these websites could offer useful models for learning about and sharing about your neighborhood's history.

### **Powelton Village**

[poweltonvillage.org](http://poweltonvillage.org)

### **West Philadelphia History Map**

[westphillyhistory.com](http://westphillyhistory.com)



## For submitting a nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

In addition to the information available on the Philadelphia Historical Commission's website, you can learn more by reading the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia's guide to *How to Nominate an Individual Building, Structure, Site, or Object to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places*.

### **Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia Guide**

[preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PA\\_Nominations\\_Online.pdf](http://preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PA_Nominations_Online.pdf)

## For community organizations

Check out the resources published by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.

### **How to Look at Your Neighborhood:**

#### **A Guide for Community Organizations**

[preservationalliance.com/files/HowToLook\\_Final2011.pdf](http://preservationalliance.com/files/HowToLook_Final2011.pdf)

## For further research

See the full list of research facilities and resources in the "Who's Who?" section at the back of this toolkit.





## “THE KING’S HIGHWAY”

**F**AR FROM THE USUAL PHILADELPHIA tourist hotspots like the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, the King’s Highway runs through Northeast Philadelphia and is a historic place in its own right. The road is part of a 1,300-mile stretch of highway that extends from Boston, Massachusetts to Charleston, South Carolina, and in Philadelphia, it takes the form of Frankford Avenue. The road has links to centuries of pre-Colonial and Colonial history, and in 2017, documentarian Jason Sherman made a film about the history of the highway.

In making the film and interviewing historians about the significant sites along Frankford Avenue that have been lost, Sherman increasingly came to use the film as a tool for learning and sharing the history of Frankford Avenue’s many neighborhoods. He teamed up with other advocates to host film screenings and tours (both self-guided and by bus), generating broader interest in the surviving history of the thoroughfare. These community leaders have also founded The King’s Highway Trust Foundation, a nonprofit with the mission to educate the public on the history of Northeast Philadelphia, preserve historic buildings, and spread awareness by engaging the community.



If you’re interested in viewing the film or learning more about the project’s advocacy, check out the film’s website.

### **The Kings Highway**

[kingshighwayfilm.com](http://kingshighwayfilm.com)



PENNYPACK PARK

FRANKFORD AVE.  
BRIDGE

KING'S HIGHWAY

FRANKFORD AVE

TORRESDALE AVE

I-95