

GLOUCESTER CITY MASTER PLAN

***HISTORIC PRESERVATION
PLAN ELEMENT***

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. What is Historic Preservation?

Historic preservation envelopes a whole collection of feelings and opinions about the protection of our history and the physical legacy that remains in our neighborhoods and communities, the built environment. In many ways, it is akin to the public appreciation of air and water quality, open spaces, and wildlife found in the natural environment. In essence, historic preservation is the method by which local governments, businesses, property owners, residents, and institutions join together to take pride in their collective history and their community's own identity and character.

Gloucester City's history dates to the 1620s when Dutch traders erected a trading post at Fort Nassau on Gloucester Point. However, Native Americans occupied and traded here thousands of years earlier. Not surprisingly, Gloucester City has a multitude of historic and architecturally significant resources, e.g. places, structures, and neighborhoods, worthy of distinction and appreciation. The purpose of this Master Plan element is to identify, evaluate, and implement measures to conserve, re-use, rehabilitate, and protect the physical legacy of Gloucester City's proud past.

B. Community Goals and Values

Interest in Gloucester City's history and historic resources was renewed in the 1960s during the state's tercentennial celebration and further strengthened in the 1970s with the country's bicentennial. In response to the City's own tercentennial of English colonial settlement, a local historic preservation zone and historic preservation commission were established by ordinance in 1985.

The City's reasons for designating this overlay zone, where exterior changes to properties are reviewed for their appropriateness and compatibility to surrounding historic fabric, were outlined in the ordinance. In addition to the goal of protection of historic resources for future generations, the local reasons for historic preservation include promotion of civic beauty, citizenship, education, recreation, neighborhood stabilization, and economic development. These values, which were also identified in the State Plan for Development and Redevelopment, have been incorporated into statewide land use and development policies as well.

C. Standards

Over the past thirty years, architects, historians, and tradespeople have worked together with the National Park Service to develop a set of guidelines that property owners could use to ensure that their historic resources are appropriately maintained, rehabilitated, and restored. Today, these widely-used guidelines are known as the "Secretary of the

Interior's Standards" and have been adopted by the City's historic preservation commission as the methods to use when working on historic properties in the local historic preservation zone. The "Standards" do not require owners to "restore" their property, but simply advise them that it is better to preserve (maintain) than to repair, better to repair than to restore, and better to restore than to reconstruct, and that modern alterations should be done in a manner which respects the structure's original design and physical integrity.

II. IDENTIFICATION

A. Historical Significance

The history of Gloucester City is a proud one. Established by Dutch traders in the 1620s as the major trading post on the South (Delaware) River, Fort Nassau initially mirrored the trading post on the North (Hudson) River that later became New York. The settlement around Gloucester Point changed hands between the Dutch and Swedish colonists until the English seized control in the 1660s. English Quakers began to flood the area in the Timber Creek watershed in the 1680s and soon made Gloucester their primary government, transportation, and trading center. (The City was once the seat of government, or shiretown, for all of modern Atlantic, Gloucester, and Camden Counties.)

In the time of early colonization, before roads were laid and kept, Gloucester was easily accessible by ships and canoes. Ferry traffic to Philadelphia was an essential part of the City's development. Within 100 years, after good roads were made, settlers moved to the interior, and Camden's ferries to Philadelphia became more popular. Gloucester City literally became a sleepy fishing village. Few above-ground resources remain from this early period, i.e. before 1844.

David S. Brown, a New England textile manufacturer, began the City's economic rebirth as an "industrial boomtown" when he established the Washington and the Gloucester Manufacturing Company textile mills in the 1840s. Other industrialists soon capitalized on Brown's idea and within a generation factories stretched along the City's three waterways, the Delaware River, Newton Creek, and Timber Creek. Rows of workers' housing following, as did commercial and public institutions, such as churches, schools, and social clubs.

Products of all manufacture were made in Gloucester City, from terra cotta to radioactive isotopes. In the twentieth century, shipbuilding employed a substantial part of the work force. Around this time, residential neighborhoods spilled into the area east of Broadway, the old suburbs. Decline began after World War II, when suburban development in the more rural neighboring municipalities syphoned residents, jobs, and commerce away from the historic city center. New York Shipyard's closure in the 1960s had a significant impact on the city's economy. The last of the Philadelphia-area shipyards closed in 1995.

B. Architectural Significance

Buildings often reflect the popular designs and styles of the period in which they were built. Because little remains from the City's pre-1844 period, most of the extant structures in the primary historic area, i.e. west of Broadway, and throughout the City are characterized by the Greek Revival, Italianate, Victorian, and Colonial Revival styles. Although many of them are common or "vernacular" examples of these styles, most still retain those characteristic features that make them charming, beautiful, and architecturally significant.

The most architecturally significant buildings are those built for wealthy individuals, such as the local businessman or mill managers; public institutions, such as churches, schools, and social halls; and commercial institutions, such as banks, stores, and theaters. The accompanying map illustrates the location of some of the more architecturally and historically significant resources both inside and outside the historic city center.

C. Preliminary Analysis and Findings

The "listing" or registration of historically and architecturally significant resources is one of the most important steps in ensuring their protection. Gloucester City has begun this process by adopting a local "historic preservation zone" in which all exterior alterations and new construction are reviewed by the City's Historic Preservation Commission for their impact on the integrity of those resources. Local historic district review is the strongest protective measure for historic resources. Currently, the local district includes all those properties west of Burlington Street from Mercer to Water Streets and properties fronting on both sides of Monmouth Street from King Street to Broadway (See Figure H-1).

The preliminary historic resource survey prepared for this plan confirmed that several individual properties and a significant part of the City west of Broadway is eligible for listing on the state and national register of historic places. Properties are basically eligible for this listing when they exhibit either local, statewide, or national significance for any of four criteria: association with important people, important events or periods of history, architectural integrity, or future archaeological research value.

Currently, no properties in the City are on the State or National Registers. Some properties such as the Mill Blocks, Judge Blandy House, Railroad Station, City Waterworks, and the Dobbs and Blackwood farmhouses, are individually eligible for listing. A large area west of Broadway, roughly between Warren and Division Streets, is also eligible as a historic district due to the area's statewide significance in all four of these criteria. Although not all of the buildings in the potential district are individually significant, when seen together the area embodies a special historic character worthy of distinction. The major "historical theme" for the proposed Gloucester City National Register Historic District would be "Nineteenth Century Industrial Boomtown." A sub-theme, especially for the archaeological resources along the waterfront area and around Proprietor's Park, would be "Colonial Trading Post and Shiretown."