

**“A STREET OF HOPES AND DREAMS:”
REHABILITATION, REVITALIZATION, AND GENTRIFICATION
ALONG MARKET STREET
IN WILMINGTON, DELAWARE**

by

Leah Virginia Kacanda

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Urban Affairs and Public Policy

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ABSTRACT

Revitalization projects are intended to stimulate positive social and economic change; in reality professionals often impose their own cultural ideologies on the rehabilitation process. Once revitalization is deemed *successful*, the environment created by rehabilitated historic structures often has the unintended effect of creating exclusionary public spaces. The purpose of this thesis is to show how established settlement patterns, policy decisions, and the resulting built environment promote gentrification and socioeconomic segregation as a means to achieve revitalization in historic downtowns. Wilmington, Delaware, is a city with a complex social history that is evident in its segregated landscape. Market Street functioned as Wilmington's main thoroughfare as the city grew from a seventeenth century port to an industrial city to a modern corporate center. Beginning in the 1940s, social strife, suburbanization, and the decentralization of the job market contributed to the city's socioeconomic decline. In 1968, race riots prompted a nine-month long occupation of Wilmington by the Delaware National Guard, which was quartered along lower Market Street. The riots and subsequent occupation further alienated and segregated the black community and discouraged suburbanites from frequenting downtown. Since the 1970s, private developers, individuals, and nonprofit organizations have worked in conjunction with the city government to preserve and revitalize the area. During the past ten years, a new wave of revitalization projects made possible by state historic preservation tax credits has resulted in the substantial rehabilitation of properties in the Market Street Historic District. Yet businesses in the area still cater

to Wilmington's black community, which represents over half of the city's population. Most of these structures have not been rehabilitated, and signage and window displays do not fit in with professional developer's concept of an economically healthy and safe main street. Strict rehabilitation guidelines often result in the elimination of architectural elements popular with the existing population. Revitalization professionals view this historic district as an opportunity to create an attractive environment for heritage tourism and economic growth. However, members of the black community perceive rehabilitation, especially of structures along lower Market Street that were once occupied by the National Guard, as yet another way to cover up a history of oppression. Promoting gentrification as the only way to improve the economic social health of downtown will create an exclusionary public space, unless steps are taken to include the entire community in the revitalization and future of Market Street.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Market Street functioned as the main street for Wilmington, Delaware as the city grew from a small seventeenth century port to an industrial city, eventually becoming a modern corporate center. In the second half of the twentieth century, social unrest, suburbanization, and the decentralization of the job market contributed to the decline of Market Street. Since the 1970s, private developers and nonprofit organizations have worked in conjunction with the city government to preserve and revitalize the area. Although intended to initiate positive economic and social change within the entire city, revitalization reflects the goals and values of a privileged socio-economic group. One tool that has been used extensively in the revitalization of Market Street is historic preservation. The rehabilitation of historic structures is an expensive and extensive process, only open to individuals with a significant amount of capital. Additionally, once completed, rehabilitated spaces create an environment that promotes residential and commercial gentrification. Promoting gentrification as the only way to improve the socio-economic health of downtown will create an exclusionary public space, unless steps are taken to include the entire community in the revitalization and future of Market Street.

Equal access to public spaces is a key component of sustainable urban development. Sustainability is often described as a balance between the three Es,

environment, economics, and equity.¹ Historic preservation represents an environmentally and economically friendly approach to urban development, because existing structures often represent a high level of embodied energy. However, the high cost of pursuing a historically appropriate rehabilitation project often highlights socio-economic inequality within communities. Preservation legislation, the creation of historic districts, and rules governing rehabilitation impose a single standard on the entire population regardless of economic status, despite the fact that historic preservation is not a priority for many members of the urban population. The choice to utilize rehabilitation to generate revitalization results in the creation of spaces that function to serve supporters of preservation and revitalization.

History has shown that the revitalization of urban districts often results in gentrification, which is defined as the socio-cultural changes in an area resulting from wealthier people purchasing housing in a less prosperous community. Traditionally, gentrification was considered to be a residential phenomenon, however, revitalization projects can also contribute to the gentrification of commercial districts. During commercial gentrification, rising real estate values displace existing businesses, and lower socio-economic groups are forced to find other places to shop. The rehabilitation of historic structures can be used as a tool to increase real estate values and the appeal of an area in order to stimulate gentrification. Although gentrification has been researched extensively in fields including urban sociology, geography, and

¹ Stephen M. Wheeler, *Planning for Sustainability: Creating Livable, Equitable, and Ecological Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4.

planning, very few studies have looked at the relationship between rehabilitation, revitalization, and gentrification in downtown commercial districts.

Gentrification results in the creation of spaces that are segregated based on socio-economic class. People often view historic downtowns as idealized landscapes that were a place of opportunity and equal access, however businessmen and city officials in control of the commercial district have always utilized exclusionary tactics to keep out undesirable members of the population.² American downtowns during the mid-twentieth century suffered as stores moved to the suburbs or went out of business. Cities and their urban planning departments were left to compete with the suburbs for both businesses and residents. Downtowns were often perceived as dangerous, while logistical issues such as a lack of parking also deterred visitors. Many cities turned to aggressive urban revitalization plans to recreate their downtowns as a viable place to live and work, but businesses were loathe to invest in an area without a residential population that would support their business, and people did not want to live near a downtown without shops and restaurants. In order to strengthen the financial base downtown, urban revitalization projects were designed to appeal to middle and upper class values rather than to the lower socio-economic groups that often lived in closer proximity to the downtown. The social inequality fostered by revitalization projects today is nothing new, as “Economic anxieties have long intertwined with core cultural

² Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 6.

ideals to make Main Streets resonant and symbolic locations, and downtown participants have manipulated and mobilized cultural values for their own purposes.”³

LITERATURE REVIEW

Revitalization can also be used to break with the past and promote social equality in the public spaces of downtown. Planners have developed models that encourage both economic and social development, as identified by Larry Ford in his book *America's New Downtowns: Revitalization or Reinvention?* Ford examines what American downtowns have been and what they are becoming, working to develop a model to gauge change, arguing that our new downtowns should not be compared to what they once were, but what other downtowns now are.⁴ More frequently, cities are nurturing the growth of their cultural capital to give them a competitive economic edge. Revitalization projects cultivate the city as a destination with a concentration of performance venues and restaurants not available in the suburbs. Often, high profile building restoration projects are marketed to generate positive press in order to convince people to return to the city. Other projects, such as pedestrian-only areas of the city, were designed to compete with suburban shopping malls. Waterfronts that were historically dominated by industry were redeveloped to accommodate waterside dining and outdoor activities. These revitalization efforts have resulted in the creation

³ Isenberg, *Downtown*, 3.

⁴ Larry Ford, *America's New Downtowns: Revitalization or Reinvention?*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 5.

of a new American downtown that focuses on developing a social experience to cultivate economic growth.

Successful revitalization projects result in a healthier business district and a larger residential population, but do not necessarily benefit the entire urban population. “The effects of renewal--increased housing stock, improved housing stock, increased tax base, increased security, increased local prestige, and physical improvements--all accrue, to varying degrees, to all groups except the original low-income residents.”⁵ Although redevelopment efforts have proven to be environmentally and economically sustainable, the benefits do not trickle down to the low-income inhabitants of the city, and are not an adequate path to fully sustainable growth.

While some research interprets socio-economic segregation as an unfortunate side effect of revitalization, other studies take a more aggressive stance. In *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Michael Lang suggests discriminatory public policies and complex urban politics function to deliberately displace lower class and minority populations.⁶ Smith sees redevelopment as directly related to both gentrification and historic preservation:

It would be anachronistic now to exclude redevelopment from the rubric of gentrification, to assume that the gentrification of the city was

⁵ Michael H. Lang, *Gentrification Amid Urban Decline: Strategies for America's Older Cities*, (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1982), 33

⁶ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, (New York: Routledge, 1996).

restricted to the recovery of an elegant history in the quaint mews and alleys of old cities, rather than bound up with a larger restructuring.⁷

It is difficult to untangle the webs of political and race relations surrounding and within redevelopment projects, which are unique to each community within an urban environment. Issues of discrimination based on race and class exist within the system as well as the built environment itself, and they must be identified and confronted by professionals in order to successfully utilize participatory planning to redevelop a community.

Urban sociology also explores how culture is manipulated to create symbols that dictate who belongs in a particular space.⁸ Historic districts are tools that protect historic structures but also limit who can live within those neighborhoods. Not everyone can navigate the complicated historic design review process, or afford the costs of construction rehabilitation often requires. Sociologist Sharon Zukin goes so far as to question the authenticity of the rehabilitated environment because it represents a re-created historical narrative that displaces recent inhabitants from a neighborhood that was once theirs with those who identify with a developer-produced narrative.⁹

Planners and preservationists are aware that preservation and gentrification changes the appearance of the built environment, but often forget to

⁷ Smith, *Urban Frontier*, 39.

⁸ Sharon Zukin, “Whose Culture? Whose City?” in *The Urban Sociology Reader*, ed. Jan Lin and Christopher Mele, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 282.

⁹ Zukin, “Whose Culture?” 286.

consider the social changes that are also a part of the process. Misplaced priorities sometimes cause professionals to miss an opportunity to preserve social equity in their concern for the aesthetics of the built environment. Although buildings can symbolize culture, the cultural identity of a place is a reflection of the people who inhabit the built environment. In “The Importance of Cultural Meaning in Defining and Preserving Sense of Place,” preservationist Barbara Anderson expounds on this phenomenon saying, “most preservationists have the mistaken notion that preserving the visual context of historic places preserves their sense of place.”¹⁰ The displacement of lower classes that often results from neighborhood revitalization may destroy the very “sense of place” on which professionals are trying to capitalize. Preservationists and architects often do not have the tools to understand and manage the social changes resulting from projects that are intended to help the local community. These changes should be as considered as important as the design decisions made during the redevelopment process.

Many social issues influence the interaction between professional developers, the municipality, long time residents, new residents, and community groups. Professionally trained preservationists often find it easier to relate to middle class gentrifiers than to the lower classes that may be displaced by gentrification. Gentrifiers are generally better educated and place a higher value on historic structures and thus perceive the need to care for them, whereas the pre-rehabilitation use of the

¹⁰ Barbara G. Anderson, “The Importance of Cultural Meaning in Defining and Preserving Sense of Place,” in *Preservation of What, For Whom: A Critical Look at Historical Significance*, ed. Michael A. Tomlin, (Ithaca, NY: The National Council for Preservation Education, 1998), 129.

structure may not reflect this concern. However, according to Anderson, it is the traditional use of buildings and spaces exhibited by lower class residents that create the “sense of place” that defines a community. Anderson calls on preservationists to incorporate the cultural meaning of a place when designating and protecting historical properties. Anderson’s argument gives both architects and preservationists the theoretical basis that can be used to develop a methodology that takes in account preserving social equity as well as architecture.

Anderson’s concept of a “sense of place” was informed by earlier works, most notably the 1995 publication, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* by Dolores Hayden.¹¹ Hayden discusses how studying urban history can facilitate an understanding of how the built environment changes over time, and goes on to illustrate her points with case studies. By setting up a methodological and theoretical framework, Hayden aims to inspire both communities and professionals to use historic urban landscapes in order to cultivate public memory. She argues:

A socially inclusive urban landscape history can become the basis for new approaches to public history and urban preservation [...] This would be urban design that recognizes the social diversity of the city as well as the communal uses of space, very different from urban design as monumental architecture governed by form or driven by real estate speculation.¹²

Based on Hayden’s analysis, it is clear that preserving the physical and cultural aspects of the built environment can be an important tool in developing a public understanding

¹¹ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

¹² Hayden, *Power of Place*, 13.

of local history and culture, thereby promoting social equity and tolerance. If professionals utilize Hayden's approach to the urban landscape, they can begin to develop ways to mitigate negative social impacts of gentrification.

The existing collective memory can be so strong that it interferes with positive progress in revitalization projects. Long-term residents have social ties and accumulated memories associated with place. By the 1980s, scholars were beginning to discuss the fact that, "A fundamental underpinning for public historic-preservation programs is the notion that a landscape expresses and reinforces collective identity."¹³ In some cases, accumulated negative memories are so strong that they have interfered with positive progress in the face of efforts at rehabilitation and revitalization. Although preservationists have power to communicate the past and control the future through rehabilitated structures, sometimes the public resists the symbolism of their new environment.¹⁴

The impact of revitalization projects on the local population is most evident in built environments in transition, in the middle of the gentrification process. Market Street in Wilmington, Delaware is a downtown in the midst of extensive revitalization efforts. Along Market Street, the use of gentrification to revitalize the historic downtown has begun to highlight socioeconomic difference within the

¹³ Robin Elisabeth Datel, "Preservation and a Sense of Orientation for American Cities," *Geographical Review* 75 (1985): 131, accessed June 17, 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/214464>.

¹⁴ Diane Barthel, "Historic Preservation: A Comparative Analyses," *Sociological Forum* 4 (1989): 102, accessed June 17, 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/684437>.

existing population. While downtown area should function as a public space available to the entire urban population, current efforts are creating an environment that appeals to the middle and upper class urbanites. If developers and the city consider the well being of the entire community throughout the revitalization process, the economic and social health of the downtown will improve without the socioeconomic segregation so often caused by gentrification.

METHODOLOGY

I first visited Market Street in the spring of 2010 for a class field trip led by Dr. David Ames of the University of Delaware's Center for Historic Architecture and Design. Although I grew up outside of Reading, Pennsylvania, a little more than an hour from Wilmington, I had no real knowledge of the city, its history, or why so many people I talked to had such negative impressions of downtown Wilmington. I was intrigued by Market Street—confused as to why entire blocks of beautifully restored buildings stood virtually empty, and why existing stores and restaurants were closed on a beautiful Saturday in April. I quickly realized that Market Street in Wilmington would be an ideal case study for examining the complex issues surrounding rehabilitation projects that are intended to revitalize downtown areas. After further research, I discovered that Wilmington is a small city in the midst of a forty-year-long revitalization project, with a complex social history evidenced by its segregated landscape.

Over the summer of 2010, I interned with Preservation Initiatives, a Wilmington firm specializing in “urban revitalization through preservation” involved

with the rehabilitation of multiple properties along Market Street. The internship allowed me to visit Market Street daily and observe the dynamics of the space and how people interacted with it. I also developed an understanding of the complexity of modern rehabilitation projects. However, I knew a knowledge of Market Street's history was crucial to my understanding of the dynamics influencing the revitalization of Market Street.

Wilmington was established in the late seventeenth century along the Christina River southwest of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Farmers from the surrounding region brought their grains to Wilmington, then known as Willingtown, to be traded. Wharves along the Christina were the center of economic activity in the colonial settlement. During the 1730s, a street grid plan was imposed on the site to accommodate expected growth. Market Street runs north and uphill from the Christina, and numbered cross streets beginning with Front Street at the river run perpendicular to Market. Brick townhouses with one to three bays and two to three stories in height were the primary building type along early Market Street. These structures housed shops along the street and were also the homes of local merchants. Some of these structures can still be found in the 200 block of Market Street.¹⁵

¹⁵ Department of Planning & Development: City of Wilmington, DE, "Market Street: City Historic District Design Guidelines (including the Market Street Mall and Lower Market Street City Historic Districts)," August 1999, Adopted by City Council October 7, 1999.

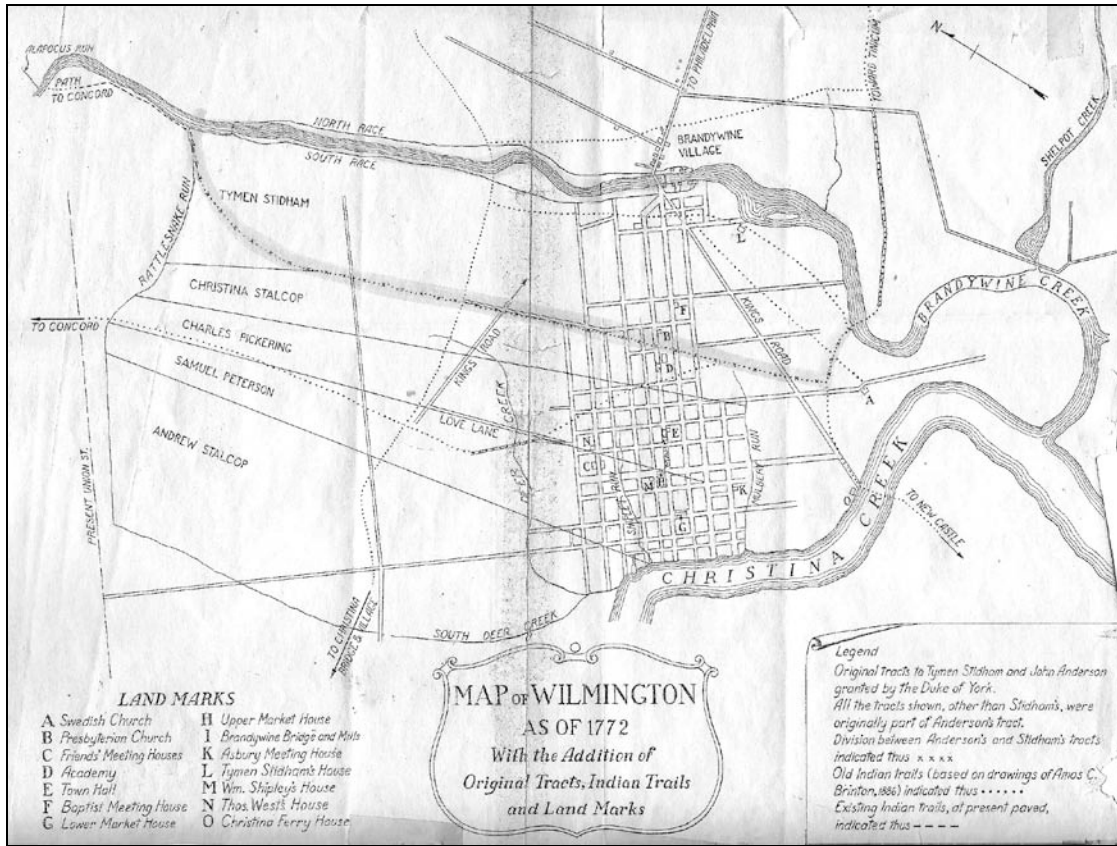


Figure 1.1 Map of Wilmington in 1772 (courtesy Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library)



Figure 1.2 Surviving eighteenth and nineteenth century structures along the 200 block (*photograph by author, taken October 17, 2010*)

Growth focused along Market Street continued throughout the eighteenth and first quarter of the nineteenth centuries, stimulated by the shipping, trade, leather, and shipbuilding industries. By the late eighteenth century, development extended north of Fifth Street. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Wilmington's economy began to transition from trade-based to industry-based. The Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad was established in 1838 along the Christina and Delaware River. Rail access was a catalyst for industrial development and population growth because it made the transfer goods in and out of the city more efficient. In

1864 the Wilmington City Railway Company constructed a horsecar trolley line that started at the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad Station at the corner of Front and French Streets. This early transit opened up land to the north and west of downtown along trolley lines to suburban development by supporting commuters. During the nineteenth century, the center of downtown development moved north along Market Street. More cultural establishments were founded such as the second empire styled Masonic Temple Grand Opera House, at 818 N. Market Street. White-collar professions, including banking began to expand.¹⁶

Similar to trends nationwide, Wilmington experienced rapid development and changes between 1880 and 1930. This growth is readily demonstrated by the population size, which almost doubled from 42,000 in 1870 to over 80,000 in 1910.¹⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century streets were paved, sewers were installed, and an electric trolley line was introduced.¹⁸ Architectural styles also changed in keeping with the changing commercial landscape, and retailers began building large structures with large windowed facades to advertise their merchandise. By the early twentieth century walking on Market Street on Friday and Saturday evenings was a major recreational activity.¹⁹ Cultural institutions proliferated in response to the increasing population. In 1915 the Clayton House Hotel at 500 North Market Street was restyled

¹⁶ Department of Planning, "Market Street," 12.

¹⁷ U.S. Census.

¹⁸ Department of Planning, "Market Street," 12.

¹⁹ Carol E. Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital: Wilmington in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1983), 35.

and converted into the Queen Theater by the mid 1910s, becoming one of many theaters found along Market Street during the early twentieth century.²⁰

Perhaps the biggest factor influencing the twentieth century growth of Wilmington and the transition of the city to a corporate center was the Du Pont Company, which moved its offices to Tenth and Market Street in 1906.²¹ The Du Pont Company manufactured gunpowder, among other chemical compounds, and prospered during the First and Second World Wars. U.S involvement in World War Two caused old heavy industry to reopen, attracting more members of the working class population to Wilmington. The growth of the Du Pont Company after the war also brought a large number of white collar employees to the Wilmington area, which contributed to suburban housing development, the decline of city housing stock, and increasing racial segregation within the city.

In 1952 the opening of Merchandise Mart, the first large shopping center on Governor Printz Boulevard outside of Wilmington, began the suburban shopping trend in the region, spelling trouble for merchants on Market Street.²² The expansion of highways and suburban development was tailored to automobile traffic, while the historic downtown had been designed with walking and trolley commuters in mind. The lack of coordinated city planning in Wilmington during the 1950s resulted in the misallocation of federal urban renewal money in slum clearance projects. During the

²⁰ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 35.

²¹ Department of Planning, "Market Street," 13.

²² Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 124.

clearance of the East Side Slum, a predominantly black community located directly to the east of Market Street, residents were promised they would receive good new housing. The promise was never met, setting a precedent that would hurt both future urban renewal efforts as well as the relationship between the city's black community and the city government.²³ Meanwhile, Interstate-95 was located on the west side in a vibrant neighborhood, in effect cutting the city in half while destroying a vibrant neighborhood.²⁴

With racial tensions at an all time high following slum clearance and the lack of housing available to black Wilmingtonians, the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. led to race riots similar to those around the nation. Unique to Delaware, however, was a nine-month occupation of the Delaware National Guard. During their time in the city, the National Guard stayed in buildings along lower Market Street. The riots and occupation further alienated and segregated the black community and discouraged suburbanites from frequenting downtown.²⁵ During the 1970s, a series of efforts at revitalization centered on Market Street began that will be the case study for the remainder of this thesis.

After developing a basic background in both Wilmington and issues related to its revitalization, I began to develop a research methodology. Because revitalization involves changing the built environment as well as perceptions of the

²³ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 132.

²⁴ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 9.

²⁵ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 9.

downtown in order to revive an urban area, my study would have to explore not only the built environment, but also the people who interact with it. In order to explore this relationship, I adopted a socio-spatial approach, which encourages the examination of how humans interact with spaces based on cultural norms, but also how those spaces are altered by individual expression.

Given that buildings are a lot easier to document than people, I began with a reconnaissance level field survey of the built environment along Market Street. In order to keep my survey organized, I began my investigation with New Castle County's online parcel search in order to construct a spreadsheet consisting of the parcel number, street number, building owner, building owner location, frontage in feet, year built, year renovated, tax assessment, previous owners, as well as the sale date and cost for current and previous owners. After obtaining basic information on each property, I used a field survey to establish the business, business owner, upper floor use, and building condition. An analysis of the resulting spreadsheet revealed information about the relationships between building type, condition, owner, businesses, and market value.

Because the last history of Wilmington was published in 1982, my next task was to develop a way to research revitalization projects that had occurred between 1982 and 2011. I relied heavily on *Wilmington News Journal* articles concerning Market Street revitalization. I also compiled a list of individuals representative of the range of parties involved with the revitalization of Market Street. Over the course of the summer, I conducted oral history interviews with Delaware historians Carol Hoffecker and Barbara Benson, Wilmington city councilman Steve Martelli, Buccini-

Pollin Group property manager Preston Hershey, Wilmington City Planner Patricia Maley, Main Street Wilmington administrator Lani Schweiger, and Wilmington Renaissance Corporation managing director Carrie Gray. Although subjective, these interviews provided me with valuable information and opinions concerning past revitalization projects, and thoughts on the future of Market Street.

ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

The organization of this thesis reflects the progression of my own understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the built environment along Market Street. As a newcomer to Wilmington, it was necessary to develop an understanding of the history of the Market Street corridor, with a focus on changes in Wilmington since the 1950s. Therefore, the second chapter discusses elements of the history and development patterns in Wilmington I found relevant to my interpretation of the modern landscape. However, history did not provide an explanation for everything I observed on Market Street. I began to research current policies and nonprofits in place that promote revitalization through rehabilitation. The impact of these organization and policies on the built environment is explored in the third chapter. However, I was still left with the power of my first experiential feelings about the Market Street—the feelings that led me to select Market Street as a case study in the first place. In the fourth chapter, I explore how the created environment is manipulated by the city and redevelopers to visually communicate meaning to members of the public

Chapter Two explores the impact of the historic landscape on current revitalization initiatives by exploring the relationship between the built environment

and Wilmington's population. By looking at Wilmington's early economy, the growth of the transportation network, and later planning initiatives, the physical limits to the growth of the built environment and settlement patterns are established. Historic events such as white flight to the suburbs, urban renewal, the race riots, and the National Guard occupation are shown to have lingering negative effects on the revitalization of the Market Street area. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how organized planning initiatives from both the public and private sector have deliberately manipulated Wilmington's built environment to try to increase the economic health of the Market Street corridor. However, a blatant disregard for the complex social history underpinning the built environment has limited the success of revitalization attempts thus far.

Building on the argument in Chapter Two, Chapter Three discusses how revitalization through the rehabilitation of historic structures will result in the gentrification of the Market Street area. Current revitalization efforts are shown to contribute to patterns of socio-economic segregation that were established historically. Federal, state, and local policies that support rehabilitation projects are discussed, as well as recent economic incentives to rehabilitation provided by state and federal historic tax credits. The disproportionate level of government funded resources available to developer led, large-scale rehabilitation efforts is explored as a factor contributing to uneven development that fosters social inequality. The success of rehabilitated residential development along Market Street has contributed to residential gentrification, which is slowly leading to the gentrification of commercial establishments along the corridor. Although gentrification is contributing to the

economic growth of Wilmington's downtown, this chapter shows gentrification will also foster social inequality by promoting the needs of the growing professional residential population over the needs of lower socio-economic groups who currently live in the area.

In Chapter Four, the focus narrows to the visual environment created by the rehabilitation of historic structures, streetscape projects, and marketing campaigns along Market Street. Revitalization projects manipulate visual cues in order to make the built environment seem more safer, more attractive, and upscale, while suggesting that lower socioeconomic groups are not welcome. Organized rehabilitation projects often capitalize on idealized positive memories of Market Street to try to cause people to forget about more controversial historic events. Although current revitalization efforts will lead to an economically viable commercial corridor, this chapter will show that order to be successful socially, Market Street must be accessible to the entire population.

Chapter Five concludes my argument, focusing on the relationship between established settlement patterns, policy decisions, and the resulting built environment. A discussion of how these factors have fostered gentrification and social inequality in Wilmington concludes with suggestions for future development. If revitalization in Wilmington continues to rely on gentrification as the only way to improve the social and economic health of the city the city will remain segregated along socioeconomic lines. If steps are taken to include the entire community in the revitalization and future of Market Street, Wilmington will be a model for healthy urban living for the entire population.

Chapter 2

THE IMPACT OF THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE ON REVITALIZATION

The settlement, development, eventual decline, and redevelopment of Market Street resulted from the interaction of Wilmington's changing population with a changing landscape. This relationship between people and space can be explored through a sociospatial approach to the urban environment. "On the one hand, human beings act according to social factors such as gender, class, race, age, and status within and in reaction to a given space... On the other hand, people also create and alter spaces to express their own needs and desires."²⁶ Historically, Wilmington developed in response to economic growth and the expansion of transportation infrastructure; however, beginning in the 1950s, professional planning efforts began to shape the urban environment. Many of the factors contributing to Wilmington's decline in the mid-twentieth century including a changing local economy, white flight to the suburbs, urban renewal policies, and increasingly segregated neighborhoods, continue to negatively impact the revitalization process today. This chapter explores the relationship between the built environment and Wilmington's population by examining the landscape of the early economy and transportation network, population and race, and professional initiatives.

²⁶ Mark Gottdiener and Ray Hutchinson, *The New Urban Sociology*, (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2006), 18.

Examining Wilmington through a sociospatial approach demonstrates how Wilmington's built environment, settlement patterns, and socioeconomic issues are the product of its history. Market Street today reflects a combination of local economics, outside intervention, and conscious decision-making from the city, redevelopers, nonprofit organizations, and private individuals. Issues of race and class continue to influence public and private perceptions of both the past and future of Market Street in Wilmington. Because revitalization efforts have ignored the significance of the recent past to the modern landscape and population, the revitalization of the Market Street corridor has not yet been successful.

LANDSCAPE OF EARLY ECONOMY AND TRANSPORTATION

The natural landscape dictated the initial settlement and development of the built environment. Wilmington is situated in a strategic geographic location along the fall line between the coastal plain and the hilly piedmont region, with the Brandywine River to the north and the Christina River to the south. Both waterways empty into the Delaware River to the east of the city. Market Street extends north, perpendicular from the Christina River. The Christina River functioned as a port for Wilmington from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, and early development occurred along Market Street between Front and Fifth Streets. Land along the Christina River and to the east of Market Street is flat and low-lying, while the area to the west of Market Street is hillier, and thus more attractive to initial settlement, resulting in historically higher property values. Today, the high-rise buildings that make up center city Wilmington are located at the high point between

the Brandywine and the Christina Rivers. The watershed line between the two rivers extends west from the intersection of Tenth and Market Street along Delaware Avenue. Rodney Square, a public square bounded by Market Street and King Street on the east and west, and Tenth and Eleventh Streets to the south and north functions as the north end of the Market Street corridor.²⁷

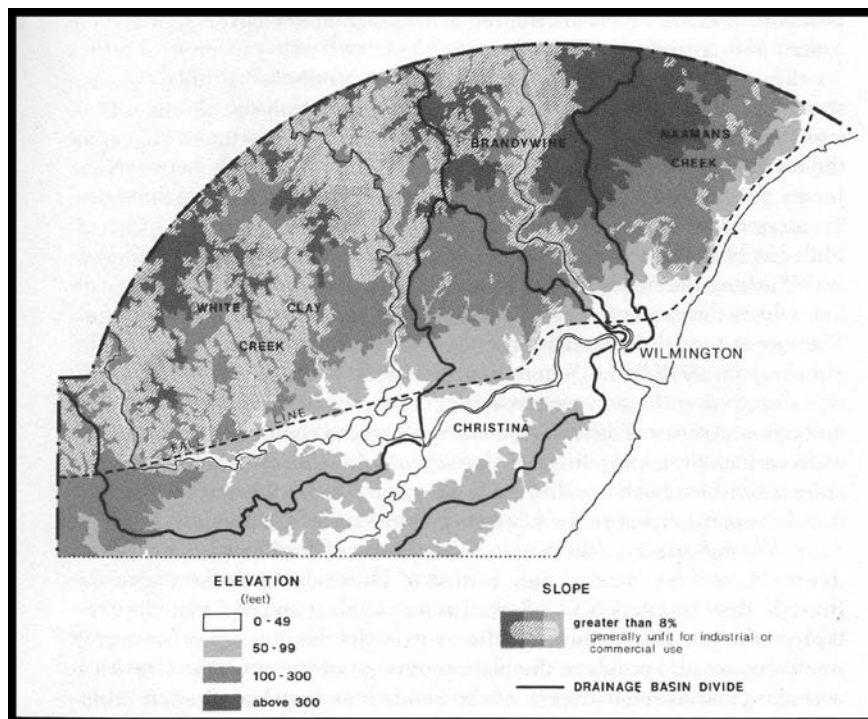


Figure 2.1 Map of New Castle County showing elevation and waterways (*Map by Marley Amstutz, Cartographer, courtesy Carol Hoffecker, Corporate Capital, 14*)

²⁷ Department of Planning & Development, “A City-Wide Plan of Land Use: A Component of the Comprehensive Development Plan for Wilmington, Delaware,” February 2003, Adopted by City Council July 2003, 1.



Figure 2.2 Market Street from MLK Boulevard to Rodney Square (*courtesy Google Earth © 2010, modified by author*)

As Wilmington transitioned from a trade-based port to an industrial center during the mid-nineteenth century, the economic focus remained on the river. Major industries in the city consisted of shipbuilding, carriage making, leather tanning, foundry work, and railroad car construction.²⁸ Expanding economic opportunities resulted in the development of more residential opportunities in the streets surrounding Market Street, which continued to function as the mercantile center for the city. The completion of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad in 1837 allowed for the easy transportation of raw materials and manufactured products to and from the Christina Riverfront, but also cut Market Street off from the Christina River. At the time of its construction, this physical barrier was desirable, as the river-based industries produced a lot of noise and pollution.

²⁸ Carol E. Hoffecker, *Wilmington, Delaware: Portrait of an Industrial City, 1830-1910*, (Richmond, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1974), 19.

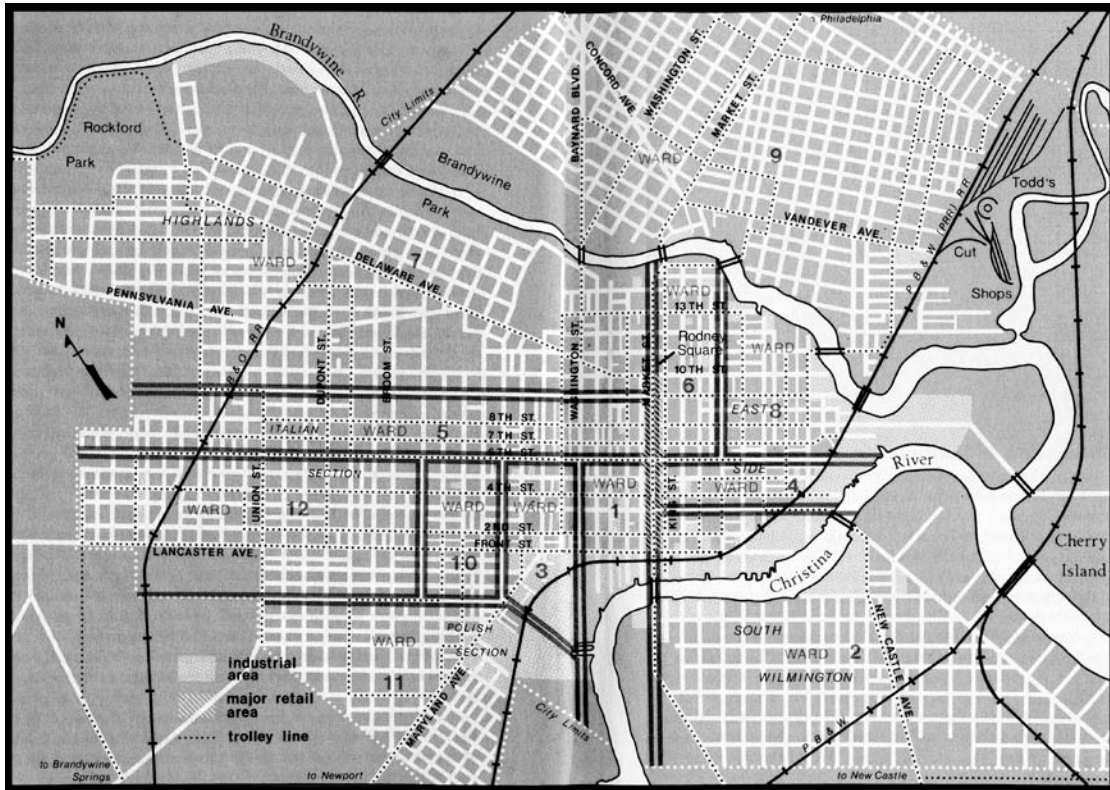


Figure 2.3 Wilmington in 1912, showing railways, trolley lines, wards, industrial, and retail areas (*Map by Marley Amstutz Cartographer, courtesy Carol Hoffecker, Corporate Capital, 22-23*)

The aging two and three-story brick structures built along lower Market Street lost value as commercial and residential development moved further north. This movement is visible in the built environment today, as the oldest and most modest buildings are located at the base of Market Street, with structures increasing in height, permanence, and prominence closer to Tenth Street. The “leap-frog” theory states that throughout the nineteenth century, residential and commercial structures were drawn northward along Market Street by cultural institutions and newer

businesses.²⁹ As white-collar professions expanded, they often located further north on Market Street away from the factory-dominated waterfront.



Figure 2.4 Market Street in the 1840s (*courtesy Delaware Historical Society Archives*)

²⁹ David L. Ames, "An Adaptive Reuse Plan for the Lower Market Street Historic District," (Newark, DE: College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, University of Delaware, 1985): 12.

In 1864, Wilmington's first horsecar line was established, opening areas outside of the city to residential development. Early construction centered around Delaware Avenue, where wealthy businessmen and industrialists built single-family homes on larger plots of land.³⁰ Economic success brought rapid growth between 1860 and 1920. Between 1860 and 1910, the population grew from 21,000 to 87,000, reaching 110,100 by 1920.³¹ The City of Wilmington improved infrastructure, introducing paved streets, sewers, and an electric trolley line along Market Street that began to operate during the 1880s. The commercial district expanded north along Market Street to Seventh Street, east to King Street, and west to Shipley Street.³² By the turn of the century, Market Street boasted a healthy, nine-block long commercial corridor that ran from the Christiana waterfront to Rodney Square.

Through the twentieth century, transportation planning increasingly dictated the shape of urban development. Beginning in the 1920s, the introduction of automobile traffic to areas of Wilmington originally designed for pedestrians proved chaotic. As the main commercial corridor, Market Street became a particularly congested area. Businesses were impacted by the increasing traffic, and delivery trucks and customer parking increasingly occupied street space. Traffic also caused pedestrians to feel unsafe. In 1932, the Mayor's Employment and Relief Committee completed its first traffic survey under the Delaware Safety Council. A locally

³⁰ Department of Planning, "A City-Wide Plan," 2.

³¹ U.S. Census Bureau.

³² Department of Planning, "Market Street," 12.

sponsored parking survey and plan was completed in 1947. Two years later the Delaware State Highway Department completed a traffic origin and destination study. These early parking and traffic concerns prompted the first organized planning efforts in Wilmington. In March of 1950, Mayor James F. Hearn appointed architect George E. Pope to head the informal Wilmington Planning Commission to examine issues of parking and traffic downtown.³³

Beyond creating unsafe conditions for pedestrians downtown, automobiles also facilitated the shift of the middle-class to the suburbs. As the middle-class relocated, businesses along Market Street began to suffer. The city and local businesses focused on accommodating automobile traffic and creating downtown parking to bring suburbanites back to the city to shop, but the convenience of suburban shopping malls prevailed. Retailers changed their focus from local residents to the growing population of daytime commuters. The once strong nine-block commercial corridor continued to shrink, with the most successful businesses clustering along upper Market Street close to modern office buildings, while lower Market Street began to decline.³⁴

LANDSCAPE OF POPULATION AND RACE

Since the seventeenth century, Wilmington provided a key service as a center of northern Delaware's economy and transportation network. Expanding trade

³³ Department of Planning, "A City-Wide Plan," February 2003, 5.

³⁴ Department of Planning, "Market Street," 14.

opportunities and river based industries created jobs, and the urban population grew in size. Different types of jobs attracted different socio economic groups. As a port city and industrial center during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Wilmington was home to a high proportion of manual laborers. Historically, Wilmington was also home to a large number of free African Americans. A free black community was established in Wilmington by the late eighteenth century. By 1840, 19 percent of Wilmington's population was black. Of those 1,616 black residents, 1,601 were free and only 15 were slaves.³⁵ The black population continued to grow through the second half of the nineteenth century, although it was outpaced by the growth of the white population. According to the 1860 and 1870 Census, the black population made up only 10 percent of Wilmington's population of 21,000 and 31,000 people respectively. By the close of the nineteenth century, Wilmington's population had grown to 76,508, with a black population of 9,736 representing almost 13 percent of the total population.

³⁵ U.S. Census Bureau.

Census	Total Pop.	White Pop.	Percent White	Black Pop.	Percent Black	Other Pop.	Percent Other
1840	8,367	6,751	80.7%	1,616	19.3%		0.0%
1850	13,979	11,839	84.7%	2,140	15.3%		0.0%
1860	21,258	19,044	89.6%	2,214	10.4%		0.0%
1870	30,841	27,630	89.6%	3,211	10.4%		0.0%
1880	42,478	37,004	87.1%	5,468	12.9%	6	0.0%
1890	61,431	53,754	87.5%	7,644	12.4%	33	0.1%
1900	76,508	66,738	87.2%	9,736	12.7%	34	0.0%

Table 2.1 Population demographics, 1840-1900

During the nineteenth century, blacks primarily worked as unskilled laborers or in the service sector as laundresses or servants. Often, families lived in smaller rowhouses in the alleys behind their employer’s residence, resulting in relatively integrated housing patterns across the city. As more immigrants came to Wilmington through the late nineteenth century, the black population competed for jobs as domestic servants and laborers, keeping Wilmington’s immigrant population low and black population high as compared to similarly sized east coast cities.³⁶

During the early twentieth century, expanding transportation networks allowed the wealthy to move to the edge of the city. First generation immigrants began to take over established white neighborhoods, pushing blacks to the back alleys of center city as well as the low lying areas to the east of Christina and Brandywine.³⁷

³⁶ Yda Schreuder, “Wilmington’s Immigrant Settlement: 1880-1920,” *Delaware History* 23.2 (Fall-Winter 1988): 140-142.

³⁷ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital*, 28.

These segregated housing patterns contributed to further job loss among the black community as servants had to travel a greater distance to work. By the turn of the twentieth century, the black community was concentrated on the east side of Market Street. In addition to housing, the east side was home to most of Wilmington's black churches, the black Howard High School, and black social institutions.³⁸

Between 1915 and 1940, two million African Americans moved from the southern United States to the West, Midwest, and Northeast, an event that came to be known as the Great Migration.³⁹ From 1910 to 1940, Wilmington's black population grew from 9,081 to 14,256, increasing from 10 to 13 percent of the total population. Yet at the same time, Greek and Italian immigrants were often chosen over blacks for more prestigious service positions, such as barbering and catering. The Great Depression was especially hard on Wilmington's black population, as unemployed skilled white laborers rapidly replaced unskilled black laborers.⁴⁰ There was so little opportunity for upward mobility in Wilmington that, "better educated or vocationally skilled black people left Wilmington in greater numbers than did less skilled members of their race."⁴¹

³⁸ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital*, 112.

³⁹ Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press at Harvard University, 2003), 465.

⁴⁰ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital*, 101.

⁴¹ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital*, 94.

Census	Total Pop.	White Pop.	Percent White	Black Pop.	Percent Black	Other Pop.	Percent Other
1900	76,508	66,738	87.2%	9,736	12.7%	34	0.0%
1910	87,411	78,309	89.6%	9,081	10.4%	21	0.0%
1920	110,168	99,382	90.2%	10,746	9.8%	40	0.0%
1930	106,597	94,459	88.6%	12,080	11.3%	58	0.1%
1940	112,504	96,175	85.5%	14,256	12.7%	73	0.1%
1950	110,356	93,079	84.3%	17,202	15.6%	75	0.1%

Table 2.2 Population demographics, 1900-1950, information from U.S. Census

Through the first half of the twentieth century, the real estate market reinforced residential segregation, suggesting that the presence of black families would lower home values in white neighborhoods. Segregated housing patterns allowed landlords to charge higher prices for residences that were not well maintained without fear of governmental interference. Black clergy and NAACP leaders began the “Better Homes Movement” in 1926 to work towards creating affordable decent homes for Wilmington’s black population, however, the city administration was not interested in the program.⁴² Although the need for more housing for the increasing black population was perceived, it was never addressed by local builders or city officials.

The Second Great Migration occurred between 1940 and 1970, and resulted in another 5 million blacks moving out of the south into the West, Midwest, and Northeast, causing another influx in the black population in Wilmington. Wilmington’s total population peaked in 1940 at 112,504. Between 1940 and 1950, the white population began to decrease, going from 96,175 to 93,079, while the black

⁴² Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital*, 94-96.

population began a period of significant growth, increasing from 14,256 to 17,202. However, the most drastic demographic change occurred between 1950 and 1960, when black population increased by another 7,720 while the white population decreased by 22,327. By 1970, the black population reached 35,072, representing 44 percent of Wilmington's total population.

Census	Total Pop.	White Pop.	Percent White	Black Pop.	Percent Black	Other Pop.	Percent Other
1950	110,356	93,079	84.3%	17,202	15.6%	75	0.1%
1960	95,827	70,752	73.8%	24,922	26.0%	135	0.1%
1970	80,386	44,901	55.9%	35,072	43.6%	413	0.5%
1980	70,195	31,663	45.1%	35,858	51.1%	2,674	3.8%
1990	71,529	30,134	42.1%	37,446	52.4%	3,949	5.5%
2000	72,664	25,811	35.5%	41,001	56.4%	5,852	8.1%

Table 2.3 Population demographics, 1950-2000, information from U.S. Census

This influx of black residents coincided with a resurgence of Wilmington industry supporting Allied efforts during World War II. An already strained segregated housing system was hard pressed to find places for new black migrants to live. Blacks were prevented from moving to the suburbs because Delaware did not have an open housing law. Although two housing authority projects did exist in South Wilmington, most blacks preferred to rent from the private market. Many of the small rowhouses in the east side were converted into multi-family apartments by white owners that took advantage of the increasing black population. This overcrowding resulted in rapid building deterioration, which was not addressed by the landlords.⁴³

⁴³ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital*, 160-163.

Deteriorating urban housing and an increasing push toward suburban development were not trends unique to Wilmington, and in 1949 the United States Congress passed the National Housing Act in order to address the nationwide shortage of decent housing. Section two of the Housing Act states:

the general welfare and security of the Nation and the health and living standards of its people require housing production and related community development sufficient to remedy the serious housing shortage, the elimination of substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas, and the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family, thus contributing to the development and redevelopment of communities and to the advancement of the growth, wealth, and security of the nation.⁴⁴

Title I of the act, entitled “Slum Clearance and Community Development and Redevelopment” authorized the Housing and Home Finance Administrator to provide loans and grants to local municipalities to pursue slum-clearance and urban redevelopment projects. One billion dollars in loans were initially authorized to fund land acquisition, slum clearance, and the preparation of land for use over a five-year period.⁴⁵ Once the land was cleared, it was to be sold or leased for private redevelopment.

⁴⁴ Committee on Banking and Currency, United States Senate, “Housing Act of 1949: Summary of the Provisions of the National Housing Act of 1949,” (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, July 14, 1949), accessed January 9, 2011, <http://ftp.resource.org/gao.gov/81-171/00002FD7.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Committee on Banking and Currency, United States Senate, “Housing Act of 1949,” <http://ftp.resource.org/gao.gov/81-171/00002FD7.pdf>.

In *Corporate Capital*, Carol Hoffecker provides a detailed overview of the impact of the Housing Act in Wilmington. By 1949, the East Side was a prime candidate for slum clearance under the Federal Housing Act. In 1953, the Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA) chose a 22-block area in the east side for urban renewal. The FHA funded project was known as “Poplar Street Project A.” The area consisted of 638 buildings, most of which were two and three story homes with shops located in the first floor of corner properties. The area represented a total of 970 dwelling units and the residents were 96 percent black. Fewer than 200 of the homes were owner-occupied. Eighty-eight businesses also were in the area, although the neighborhood was only a few blocks from Market Street. Local institutions including two schools, four churches, and a settlement house would be spared. The WHA hired Carolyn Weaver, a social worker, to be the liaison between the WHA and “Poplar Street Project A” residents and owners. Weaver campaigned for the project, convincing residents that once the bad housing was torn down, residents could move back into brand new housing. Although residents would have had first choice at the new housing, it would not have been affordable as federal regulations prevented constructing low-income housing in slum areas. The false promises made to the black community by the city during these early renewal efforts were to haunt all subsequent efforts at urban renewal in Wilmington.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital*, 131-132.



Figure 2.5 Buildings on Fourth Street between Walnut and Poplar Streets demolished for the Poplar Street Project (*courtesy Delaware Historical Society Archives*)

As demolition for “Poplar Street Project A” occurred, new black families were moving to Wilmington from southern Delaware and the Maryland eastern shore as agricultural jobs were lost to mechanization. The only public housing options for incoming migrants and blacks displaced by urban renewal were four hundred units at a low-income housing project known as Riverside in northeast Wilmington. Approximately one third of those displaced by “Poplar Street Project A” went to Riverside, one third went to private rentals on the West Side, and one third disappeared. The increasing black population in the West Side caused the established

white populations to move and rent out their properties. This shift maintained segregation, and resulted in the blight migrating. However, the neighborhood that emerged on the West Side was even more unstable because it lacked black cultural institutions. Demographic statistics from the era reflect this drastic change. The near West Side, or area closer to Market Street, changed from 88 percent white to 54 percent black between 1960 and 1968.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital*, 162.

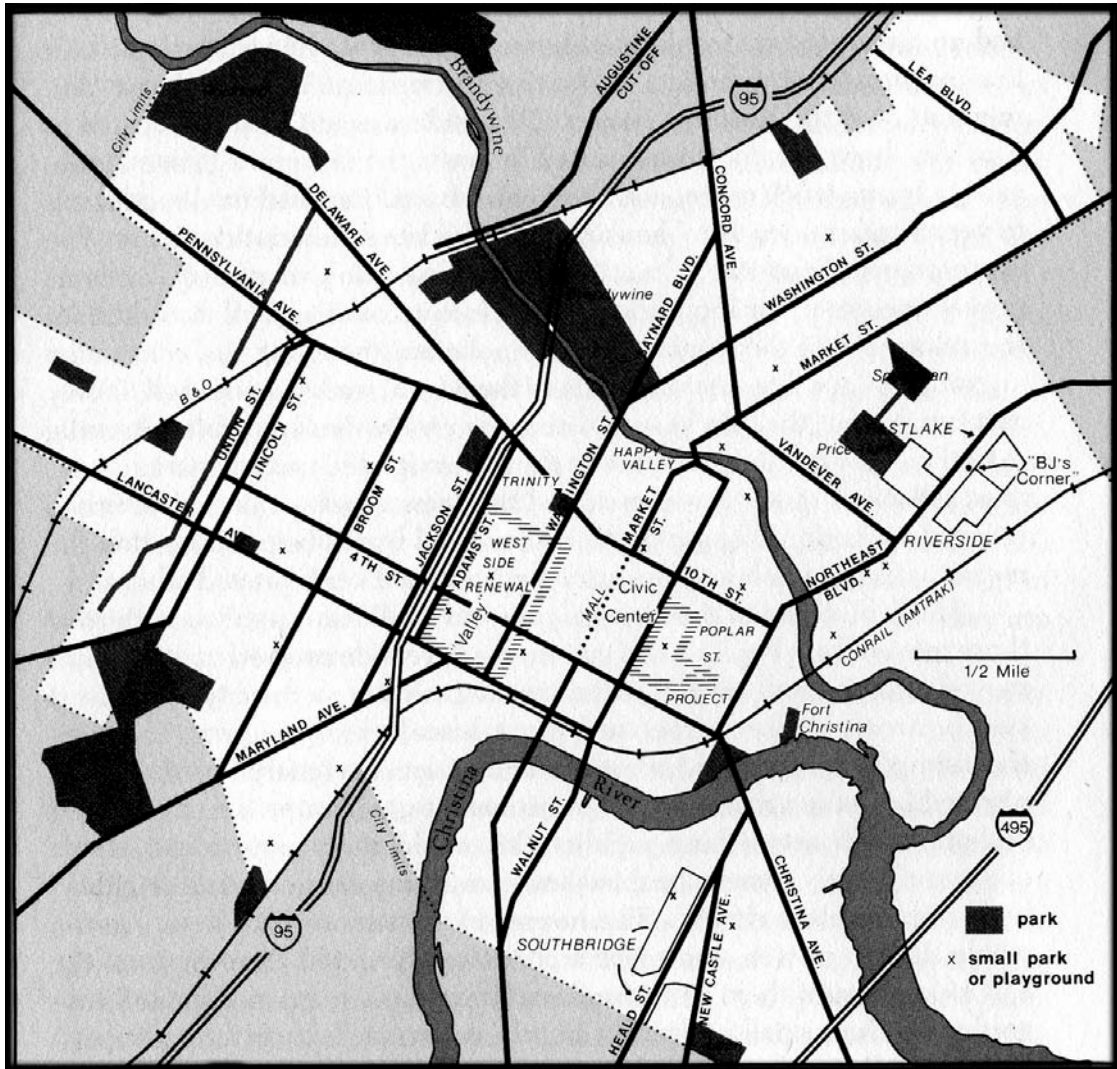


Figure 2.6 Wilmington during the 1960s, showing Poplar Street Project area, the West Side, Interstate-95 corridor, and Market Street Mall (Map by Marley Amstutz Cartographer, courtesy Carol Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital*, 161)

The loss of industrial jobs, increasing isolation and segregation of the East and West Side, and a decaying urban environment all contributed to escalating racial tensions throughout Wilmington during the 1960s. Incidents of civil unrest involving shootings and explosion occurred in the West Side during the summer of 1967. In order to maintain order, Wilmington Mayor John Babiarz supplemented the city police department with units from the state police, put local National Guardsmen on alert, and instituted a curfew. Delaware Governor Charles L. Terry subsequently sent a task force to the city to investigate the causes of the civil unrest. The state investigation uncovered overly high rents, unenforced building codes, poor schools, and a discriminatory job market. The investigation also found the majority of the black community blamed the “white power structure” for the problems within the black community.⁴⁸

Initial news of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968 was met without violence in Wilmington while riots erupted in cities across the U.S. On Tuesday, April 9, the day of King’s funeral in Atlanta, minor disturbances began to occur in the West Side. Mayor Barbiarz addressed the initial disturbances with a curfew, but refused help from the state police and National Guard. By that afternoon, thirty-five fires had been set in homes in the West Side in areas where the Housing Authority had promised low-income housing. “Two police cars were fire-bombed, more than 40 people were injured, and 154 were arrested before state and city police, assisted by the National Guard, cordoned off a 20-block area.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 190-191.

⁴⁹ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 197-198.



Figure 2.7 Protesters along the 800 block of Market Street, accessed February 2, 2011, (courtesy News-Journal Papers, accessed February 6, 2010, <http://www.oldwilmington.net/oldwilmington/1968-riots.html>)



Figure 2.8 Smoke rising from fires set in the West Side, accessed February 2, 2011 (courtesy News-Journal Papers, accessed February 6, 2010, <http://www.oldwilmington.net/oldwilmington/1968-riots.html>)

Although the riots resulted in no life threatening injuries or deaths, unlike riots in larger cities like Washington D.C. and Detroit, they were the last straw in a string of race-related tensions in Wilmington. When Mayor Barbiarz requested 1,000 National Guardsmen from Governor Terry in order to restore order, Delaware's entire force of 2,800 troops were mobilized and sent to Wilmington. By April 10, the riots were over and the Mayor relaxed the curfew, however the troops remained in the city.⁵⁰ By May, Wilmington was the only city in the U.S. still occupied by National Guard troops who regularly patrolled the streets of black neighborhoods in full battle gear.



Figure 2.9 National Guardsmen on patrol outside of Kennard's at 617 Market Street, accessed February 2, 2011, (*courtesy News-Journal Papers, accessed February 6, 2010, <http://www.oldwilmington.net/oldwilmington/1968-riots.html>*)

⁵⁰ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 200.

The situation was so unusual that the writer Calvin Trillin from *The New Yorker* traveled to Wilmington during the winter of 1968 to investigate the impact of the occupation on the city. Trillin quotes a state trooper saying, “As you ride through, it doesn’t seem like they have a feeling of resentment... It’s more like pure hate.”⁵¹ After interviewing members of the black community, Trillin found, “many residents of the ghetto find the presence of an armed military force of any size a unique reminder of their helplessness, a reminder that they have neither the physical force nor the political influence to do anything about it.”⁵²

The occupation lasted from April 1968 to January 1969, when Delaware’s new governor Russell Peterson ordered the National Guard to leave Wilmington.⁵³ During their time in Wilmington, the Guard was housed in the buildings along lower Market Street, a reminder of the drastic changes that had occurred in the heart of commercial Wilmington. Carol Hoffecker identified a profound statement from black valley resident Archie Lewis in a *Journal-Every Evening* article published in January 1969. Lewis prophesied, “When we needed unity the most, the sight of the guards drove a wedge that divided blacks and whites. They bred hate and mistrust that will take years to overcome.”⁵⁴ The truth of this statement is overwhelmingly evident in the segregated city that Wilmington remains to this day.

⁵¹ Calvin Trillin, “U.S. Journal: Wilmington During the Thirty-Third Week of National Guard Patrols,” *The New Yorker*, (December 7, 1968), 190.

⁵² Trillin, “U.S. Journal: Wilmington,” 197.

⁵³ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 205.

⁵⁴ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 205.

Urban renewal projects funded by the Federal Housing Act radically changed the built environment and settlement patterns of the black community in Wilmington. Federally subsidized highway projects coupled with the increasing use of the automobile expanded the regional transportation network, providing easy access to jobs and economic resources in the city from the comfort and safety of a single-family home in the suburbs. Increasingly, the only people who remained in Wilmington were those who could not afford to leave. Left with a population unable to provide a healthy tax base, city officials began to depend on organized planning efforts to revitalize Wilmington around misguided and ineffective attempts at urban renewal.

LANDSCAPE OF PLANNING

The already struggling Market Street commercial corridor was dealt a severe blow by the race riots and subsequent nine month long National Guard occupation. Suburbanites who initially found shopping downtown inconvenient were now too afraid to come into the city, thanks to fears propagated by the local press and the government imposed presence of military troops. It became clear that Market Street required drastic changes to its physical appearance in order to persuade people that it was a safe area to shop and visit. Beginning in the 1970s, a series of locally led initiatives aimed at revitalizing the historic commercial corridor began to change the face of Market Street.

In 1972, Mayor Thomas Maloney's new administration led the effort to convert Market Street into a pedestrian mall to make the area safer for pedestrians

while competing with suburban shopping malls.⁵⁵ Market Street was closed off to automobile traffic between Forth and Ninth Streets and converted into a park-like setting, with plenty of benches and trees for shade. The Market Street Mall was an attempt to attract the daytime commuter population to Market Street while creating a friendlier environment for all pedestrians. Struggling businesses would also benefit from the increased foot traffic. The city also commissioned David A. Crane and Partners, an architecture firm from Philadelphia, to complete a study of façade improvement options for buildings along the Market Street Mall. In 1980 the city established the Market Street Mall Façade Improvement District “to create a legal framework within which property owners and businesses on the Market Street Mall could safely improve their building facades and make other structural and aesthetic improvements with the assurance that nearby properties would also be improved.” Legislation required that the Department of Licenses and Inspections to make recommendations to property owners, who were given six months to submit proposals to the Design Review and Planning Commission, or risk citation. This city-led initiative encouraged the first round of private investment into individual properties.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 235.

⁵⁶ Department of Planning, “Market Street,” 15.



Figure 2.10 Market Street Mall in 1988, (*courtesy Delaware Historical Society Archives*)

Concurrent with the development of the Market Street Mall, a local architect named George Whiteside III founded the Ethnic Studies and Cultural Center in order to save a collection of four eighteenth century buildings from locations around the city. Although Whiteside's original proposal involved moving the houses to a location on the East Side, Mayor Maloney's administration offered the assistance of urban renewal funds if the buildings were moved to Market Street.⁵⁷ The Willingtown Square project was completed on the west side of Market Street in the middle of the 500 block in 1976, and is now owned by the Delaware Historical Society.

⁵⁷ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 235-237.



Figure 2.11 Willingtown Square (*photograph by author, taken February 9,2011*)

The restoration of the Grand Opera House was the redevelopment initiative that garnered the most local attention and support. The monumental Second Empire style building with a cast iron façade had suffered years of decay and neglect at its location at 818 N. Market Street. Although the structure had initially functioned as a theater and home of the Grand Lodge of the Masons, it later served as a vaudeville stop and a movie theater, closing its doors in 1967.⁵⁸ On December 2, 1971, a gala show at the Grand kicked off the project with widespread support from over 3,600

⁵⁸ “History of the Grand,” The Grand Opera House, accessed September 24, 2010, <http://www.thegrandwilmington.org/About/History>.

contributors. The opening performance occurred on November 20, 1974.⁵⁹ The Grand remains one of the main cultural attractions along Market Street today.



Figure 2.12 The Grand Opera House (*photograph by author, taken October 17, 2010*)

⁵⁹ Hoffecker, *Corporate*, 236-238.

Despite early revitalization efforts including the creation of the Market Street Mall, the restoration of the Grand Opera House, and the Willingtown Square Project, businesses on Market Street continued to struggle. In 1979 Wilmington Dry Goods, the city's largest retailer, closed its doors, shifting the business focus from the Market Street store to three suburban locations in the surrounding region. The loss of Market Street's most popular shopping destination negatively impacted the remaining businesses on the street, leaving cultural destinations such as the Grand and the Delaware Historical Society as some of the main attractions.

During this era of drastic commercial and demographic change in Wilmington, the fledgling planning department struggled to develop initiatives to combat a rapidly deteriorating city. Market Street in the 1960s found itself between the historic black community on the East Side, and the growing slums on the West Side. The industry that had dominated the riverfront was in decline and Wilmington's historic commercial district was suffering.

Through the mid-twentieth century, efforts at revitalization on Market Street were supported by city led planning initiatives aimed to help the entire city. Wilmington's early focus on transportation-based planning studies was limited in scope and behind the times in the professional planning community. During the early twentieth century, the City Beautiful movement focused on improving urban health and safety thorough aesthetically pleasing design based on European models. While other regional cities such as Philadelphia incorporated projects such as the Benjamin Franklin Parkway into their city plan beginning in the late 1910s, Wilmington's first steps towards professional organized planning were prompted by the federal

government. In order to take advantage of slum clearance and redevelopment initiatives under the Federal Housing Act of 1949, urban areas were required to have comprehensive plans. Comprehensive plans determined whether a land area should be devoted to residential, commercial, or industrial use, but also included plans for transportation, public facilities, and redevelopment.⁶⁰ In 1952 Wilmington hired the urban planner Harold M. Lewis to develop a comprehensive plan. By May of 1953, the “Preliminary Planning Studies for the City of Wilmington” report identified blighted areas, recommended further comprehensive planning, and recommended state legislation to approve local comprehensive planning.⁶¹

Legislation enabling local comprehensive planning passed the Delaware General Assembly in June 1953, and by October 29 of the same year the City Council passed an ordinance establishing the Wilmington Planning Commission. The original members were appointed in December with the power to develop a comprehensive plan. Between 1953 and 1956 “A City-Wide Plan of Land Use” and “A Street Thoroughfare Plan” were adopted. A comprehensive plan was completed between 1957 and 1959 that included studies of residential, industrial, and undeveloped areas.⁶²

Phase One of the comprehensive plan was amended until 1967 when the City Charter was reorganized, and has been subsequently amended by the City Council

⁶⁰ “Comprehensive Planning,” last modified 2010, www.urbanplan.org/UP_Glossary/UP_Glossary.html.

⁶¹ Department of Planning, “A City-Wide Plan,” February 2003, 5.

⁶² Department of Planning, “A City-Wide Plan,” February 2003, 7.

and City Planning Commission. Phase Two of the comprehensive plan, *The Pilot Plan for Downtown Wilmington*, along with the Community Renewal Program was developed between 1962 and 1966. These documents included land use plans for the central business district (CBD) as well as older residential neighborhoods around the CBD that focused on taking steps toward redevelopment. After 1968, the focus of the Planning Commission switched from land use planning to policy and management planning in order to handle economic, social, and fiscal problems. Phase Three was developed between 1975 and the mid 1980s, and reflected a renewed emphasis on land use planning, reflected in updated neighborhood and district plans based on residential input. Phase Three also incorporated changes made by Community Renewal Program.⁶³ The revised 1984 City-Wide Plan included amendments that had been made since 1956 as well as updated demographic data from U.S. Census.

Since 1990, the Planning Commission has been updating neighborhood plans. The “Downtown Wilmington Development Vision and Strategy Report,” published in August 1997 recommends changes to zoning, housing and building codes in order to address design standards, parking lot landscaping standards, and tax abatement programs. The report also implemented a university campus district and the cultural arts district as part of the Lower Market Street City Historic District.⁶⁴ The 2003 update to City-Wide Plan is the most recent planning document. This iteration includes updated demographic data from 1990 and 2000 Census, data from the 2002

⁶³ Department of Planning, “A City-Wide Plan,” February 2003, 3.

⁶⁴ Department of Planning, “A City-Wide Plan,” February 2003, 12.

Population Projection Series from Delaware Population Consortium, as well as a discussion of current planning initiatives and a review of modern planning mandates.⁶⁵ In Wilmington, the City-Wide Plan and all of the supporting documents, including neighborhood and historic district plans, dictate the shape of all future development and redevelopment in the city.

Planned changes to the transportation network throughout Wilmington continued to impact residential settlement patterns and the commercial landscape through the second half of the twentieth century. Local highways and roads within the city were planned to be an efficient mode of transportation for commuters and visitors traveling by car. These roadways also functioned as physical barriers between neighborhoods throughout the city, creating a downtown more convenient to automobiles than people. Many of these planning decisions overlooked the impact of these highways, boulevards, and roadways on residents of the city in favor of a growing corporate commuter population.

In 1963, the construction of Interstate-95 through Wilmington irreversibly changed Wilmington's built environment. I-95 is located nine blocks west of Market Street, cutting through the city from Front Street to Delaware Avenue between Jackson Street to the west and Adams street to the east. In addition to irreparably destroying a healthy neighborhood in the heart of the city, the "canyon" created by the interstate also created another physical barrier between the downtown Market Street area and the

⁶⁵ Department of Planning, "A City-Wide Plan," February 2003, 4.

west side of the city.⁶⁶ The perceived positive impact of the highway included faster travel within and to and from the city. By enabling an easier commute, the highway further sped up the move of the middle-class to the suburbs, which proved to be a key factor in the decline of the commercial downtown.



Figure 2.13 The Interstate-95 corridor, MLK Boulevard, and Market Street between MLK and 12th Street (courtesy Google Earth © 2010, modified by author)

⁶⁶ Interstate-95 is located below the grade of the city between Fifth Street and Delaware Avenue.

Existing streets within the downtown area also underwent extensive upgrades to accommodate increased traffic resulting from the growing commuter population coupled with highway development. King Street, located a block east of Market Street, was converted to a one-way southbound three-lane road to enable rapid north to south travel on the east side of the city. King Street also was the western perimeter of the area razed for “Poplar Street Project A.” Although the displaced residents of the area were promised new housing in that location, the empty land was eventually used to house the New Castle County Court House, parking garages, hotels, and other administrative centers. French Street, the next north-south street to the east, and also a part of the razed area, is now home to the Louis L. Redding City/County Building as well as the Elbert N. Carvel Delaware State Building.

Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard was conceived in the late 1970s as a way to connect the base of King Street at Second Street with access ramps to I-95. Ranging in width from four to six lanes, the construction of MLK Boulevard required the demolition of buildings occupying ten city blocks. Because the area bounded by Second Street to the north, Front Street to the south, King Street to the east, and Justison Street to the west was eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, the Delaware Department of Transportation was required to conduct an archaeological and historical survey of the area under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ David T. Clark, et al, “Final Archaeological Investigations at the Wilmington Boulevard Monroe Street to King Street, Wilmington, New Castle County, Delaware, Deldot Archaeology Series 29,” eds. Terry H. Klein and Patrick H. Garrow, Soil

Once completed, MLK Boulevard enabled easier access to and from south Wilmington, including Riverfront area restaurants, shops, and offices as well as the train station. However, the success of the project as a transportation corridor was only possible through the loss of the built environment and archaeological remains dating to Wilmington's earliest history. MLK Boulevard also became another physical factor separating lower Market Street and the East and West Side from the Riverfront area. Including lanes of traffic, medians, and the elevated train tracks, two hundred and fifty feet separate the north side of MLK Boulevard from the south side of the tracks.⁶⁸ Planners and developers are still struggling to connect the revitalized Riverfront area with revitalization efforts along Market Street.

Systems Inc. and Delaware Department of Transportation, 1984, accessed January 9, 2011, http://www.deldot.gov/archaeology/wilm_boulev/toc.shtml, ii.

⁶⁸ Barbara Benson and Carol Hoffecker, interviewed by the author, University of Delaware Center for Historic Architecture and Design Archives, August 8, 2010.



Figure 2.14 MLK Boulevard, with Riverfront attractions on the left and the base of Market Street on the right, (*photograph by author, taken October 17, 2010*)

Although Wilmington began as a walking city and expanded around early public transit, more recent infrastructure development such as MLK Boulevard, I-95, and King Street cater to vehicular traffic. More cars in the downtown area also required more parking options. Shipley Street is located one block to the west of Market Street and functions as a back alley, where garbage bins and a small sidewalk create an unfriendly walking environment. Many of the properties along the west side of Shipley Street were razed in order to create parking lots and garages. Although parking is now readily available, it is not free or as convenient as parking in suburban shopping areas. Efforts to make Wilmington automobile friendly also made the streets unfriendly to pedestrians.



Figure 2.15 Parking lots and garages in the Market Street area (*courtesy Google Earth © 2010, modified by author*)

Although not as severe a physical barrier as I-95 and MLK Boulevard, King Street and Shipley Street also function as buffers between Market Street and the rest of the city. King Street with its high-rise government buildings effectively limits pedestrian access from the East Side to Market Street. Likewise, the parking lots and garages located along Shipley Street create a no-mans-land and visual divide between Market Street and the West Side. While the city, state, and federal government poured money in to transportation infrastructure during the second half of the twentieth century, neighborhoods isolated by those same projects were left to languish.

Through the late twentieth century, the City of Wilmington focused on developing transportation infrastructure and policies that would attract corporate businesses to Wilmington. The decreasing size and income level of the population did not bring the city much tax revenue. This focus on bringing corporate dollars to Wilmington was an attempt to revitalize the city, in many ways at the cost of its current inhabitants. The city had plenty of open space for development after the decline of industry and large scale manufacturing, while the development of local roads and highways allowed for an easy and fast commute from the suburbs. Corporations were encouraged to come to Wilmington to take advantage of the tax structure. Delaware's Financial Center Development Act of 1981 "liberalized the laws governing banks operating within the state" and by 1986 state legislation took effect that attracted international finance and insurance companies.⁶⁹ The policy changes worked, and today corporate high-rise structures dominate the Riverfront and the

⁶⁹ Department of Planning, "A City-Wide Plan," February 2003, 2.

center city area above Ninth Street. These policies were intended to have a twofold effect: to increase the city's coffers through a wage tax while increasing the daytime population, which would in turn support local businesses. The city was still left with the task of making Wilmington an attractive destination and residence for its new commuter population, which was estimated at 45,000 people in 2009.⁷⁰ Although the City of Wilmington is involved with revitalization through the city's own Department of Economic Development, multiple nonprofit organizations were created in partnership with the city to focus exclusively on redevelopment goals.

The Wilmington Renaissance Corporation, or WRC, was formed in 1993 under the name "Wilmington 2000" in order to work towards redevelopment goals in the year 2000. The name was changed in order to continue after the year 2000 in their mission,

to develop and implement strategies that will increase the economic vitality of Downtown Wilmington, strengthen its role as a center of educational, cultural and social activity, and enhance its reputation as an exciting place to live and visit by marketing Wilmington's unique history and character.⁷¹

Although the organization has always worked in close collaboration with the City of Wilmington, it is a nonprofit that is privately funded through primarily corporate sponsors. WRC's mission focuses on multiple aspects of the revitalization process,

⁷⁰ Retail Market Answers, LLC, "Main Street Wilmington Strategic Merchandising Plan – DRAFT," Main Street Wilmington, July 2009, obtained from Christian Winburn August 2010, 1.

⁷¹ Wilmington Renaissance Corporation. "Wilmington Renaissance Corporation Strategic Plan 2009-2012," accessed September 21, 2010. <http://www.downtownwilmington.com:80/About/About-Us/2009-2012-Strategic-Plan>.

including transportation initiatives, commercial and residential development, and cultural activities and events. The vision statement details an idealized version of Wilmington in which the city is first described as a “thriving center of commerce, education, tourism and culture,” and secondly as a destination. The focus on, “a new generation of city dwellers,” makes it difficult to imagine where residents of the East and West side population will fit into the rosy picture painted of a thriving downtown.

In many ways, the Market Street Mall was designed to appeal to the daytime working population, not to Wilmington’s residents. However, the economic recession of the mid 1990s coupled with changes in corporate policies spelled the end for the pedestrian only area. Corporations located in Wilmington began to change their approach to attract employees to a city that was less and less attractive as a place to work. By building cafeterias with affordable subsidized lunches, and in some cases dry cleaners and hair salons, the commuter population often had no need to leave their office. Lunches also were shortening, from a full hour to only half an hour, making it difficult to leave the building to shop or eat.⁷² Businesses along the Market Street Mall began to lose commuter shoppers during once busy lunch hours.

In an attempt to revitalize the Market Street corridor, the City of Wilmington decided to open the Market Street Mall up to vehicular traffic. According to the press release from the Delaware Department of Transportation, the goal was to “stimulate economic development and continue the revitalization of the City’s Downtown District so Wilmington’s ‘main street’ can effectively function as a

⁷² Carrie Gray, interviewed by the author, University of Delaware Center for Historic Architecture and Design Archives, August 9, 2010.

connector for the Central Business District to the continually developing Ships Tavern District and Christina Riverfront.” In September 2001, Phase One of the Market Street Reconstruction Project began between Ninth and Eleventh Street at a cost of \$1,975,004. Phase Two of the project between Seventh and Ninth Street began in 2003. The third and final phase of the project was broken into two portions that cost a total of \$5,386,641. The portion of Market Street from Fourth to Seventh Street was completed in 2006, while Fourth to MLK Boulevard was completed in 2007. Eighty percent of the project was funded with Federal dollars from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), and the remaining 20 percent was paid by the City of Wilmington.⁷³ By the end of the project, Market Street was open to two-way traffic. Brick sidewalks edged with granite curbs and regularly spaced tree planters improved the overall appearance of the street. The incorporation of brick crosswalks into the design aimed at reintroducing automotive traffic while maintaining a safe pedestrian environment. The project drastically changed the appearance of the Market Street corridor.

⁷³ “Phase Three of Market Street Reconstruction Project to Begin July 12,” Delaware Department of Transportation, June 29, 2006, accessed January 3, 2011, <http://www.deldot.gov/public.ejs?command=PublicNewsDisplay&id=2431>.



Figure 2.16 Streetscape improvements at Seventh and Market Street
(photograph by author, taken October 17, 2010)

Downtown Visions, a Wilmington nonprofit organization, has been responsible for Market Street's upkeep since it was created by Wilmington City Council in 1994. The main mission of this private nonprofit is to keep the Wilmington Downtown Business Improvement District clean and safe to facilitate increased retail investment while reducing crime. A \$1.85 million dollar operating budget is provided primarily by taxes. Twenty-six percent of the budget goes to cleaning, while 43 percent of it goes to safety initiatives, with the remainder devoted to administrative, marketing, and facilities and equipment. At the end of 2006 Downtown Visions was

reauthorized for an additional ten years to continue their current mission while expanding to become a partner of Main Street Wilmington.⁷⁴

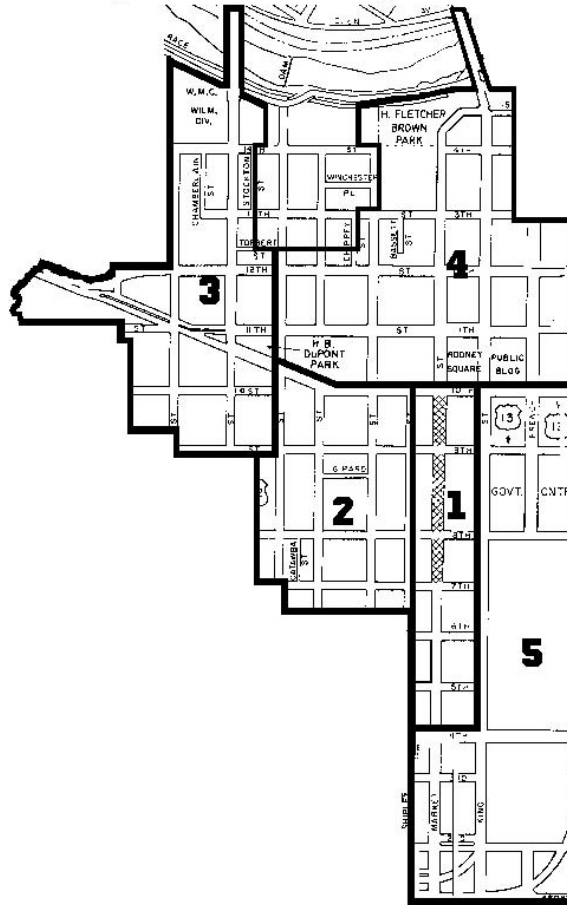


Figure 2.17 Wilmington Downtown Business Improvement District area
(courtesy *Downtown Visions*, accessed February 6, 2010,
<http://www.downtownvisions.org/about-us/bid-map>)

⁷⁴ “About DTV,” *Downtown Visions*, accessed September 23, 2010,
<http://www.downtownvisions.org/about-us>.

Currently, the most active nonprofit group working to revitalize the central business district is Main Street Wilmington. The group utilizes the National Trust Main Street Program's "four point approach," which focuses on organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring to "build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort."⁷⁵ Main Street Wilmington was created in 2006 by Wilmington's Mayor James Baker to connect all of the groups involved with revitalization, including Downtown Visions, WRC, the Downtown Business Association, the City's Office of Economic Development, and Wilmington City Council.⁷⁶ Recent efforts, such as the Vacancy Treatment Initiative and the Façade and Signage Grant Program, which will be expanded on in the next chapter, have focused specifically on the revitalization of Market Street.

When Main Street Wilmington was formed in 2006, the goal was to implement the National Trust Main Street Four-Point Approach™ for revitalization along Market Street, consisting of:

1. Economic Restructuring: Redefines the district's niche in the marketplace and sharpens the competitiveness of existing businesses, while nurturing new enterprises that respond to today's consumers' needs.

⁷⁵ "The Main Street Four Point Approach," National Trust for Historic Preservation, accessed October 1, 2010, <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-approach/>.

⁷⁶ "Welcome to Main Street Wilmington!" Main Street Wilmington, accessed October 1, 2010, <http://mainstreetwilmingtonde.org/Default.aspx>.

2. Design: Targets Infrastructure and building improvements that lay the groundwork for a physical transformation that will be both functional and attractive.
3. Promotion: Focuses on authentic community assets, with high-quality image development campaigns and events that will attract new shoppers, visitors, and residents.
4. Organization: Builds a pathway to leadership in local efforts by launching community-based, volunteer-driven nonprofit entities that empower residents and investors to collaborate for sustainable revitalization.⁷⁷

The National Trust Main Street program was established in 1980 in order to offer support to local initiatives like Main Street Wilmington through professional training, technical assistance, and educational resources. With a motto of “revitalizing America’s traditional business districts to build sustainable communities,” the National organization focuses on facilitating a local community led revitalization process.⁷⁸

Main Street Wilmington, although a non-profit focused on revitalization, is not rooted in the community, but is largely composed of professionals. The board is headed by Norman L. Pernick of Cole, Schotz, Meisel, Forman & Leonard, P.A., a nationally prominent law firm. Other board members include two representatives of the City of Wilmington Office of Economic Development, two from Wilmington City Council, and one representative each from Buccini/Pollin Group, Delaware College of

⁷⁷ Main Street: National Trust for Historic Preservation, “National Trust Main Street Center Brochure,” accessed November 22, 2010, <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-center/ntmsc-marketing-brochure.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Main Street, “National Trust Main Street Center Brochure.”

Art and Design, the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Visions, and the Delaware Economic Development Office. Although two local business owners are represented on the board, one is also involved with development projects. The sole staff person of Main Street Wilmington is Lani Schweiger, who has a full-time position as the Administrative Assistant/Project Coordinator at Downtown Visions. Although the MSW website states, “the efforts of Main Street Wilmington are entirely community driven, with work carried out by volunteers from a wide variety of backgrounds and occupations. This foundational premise ensures that the members of the community have ownership in the direction it takes,” it is apparent that this “community” is composed primarily of professionals.⁷⁹ Without strong involvement from business owners or Wilmington residents, Main Street Wilmington’s goals for revitalization will reflect the needs of Wilmington’s growing professional population.

CONCLUSION

This chapter begins to reveal the complex relationship between the built environment, Wilmington’s population, and current revitalization efforts. Although nonprofits are extensively involved with the revitalization of the Market Street corridor, a look at their organization and mission statements reveal an approach that is wholly based on optimistic future possibilities, with little to no acknowledgment of the power of local history. Historic demographic changes, including white flight to the suburbs and segregated housing patterns, have clearly impacted the physical,

⁷⁹ “What We Do,” Main Street Wilmington, accessed November 22, 2010, <http://mainstreetwilmingtonde.org/WhatWeDo>.

economic, and social decline of the urban environment. Conversely, planned design and policy decisions, including urban renewal and the construction of a new transportation network also determined settlement patterns and limited options for positive growth. Coupled with traumatic events in Wilmington's past such as the race riots and subsequent National Guard occupation, these factors have limited the success of revitalization attempts. By recognizing the power behind the landscapes of economy, transportation, race, and planning, a sociospatial approach to the revitalization of Market Street may be the key to developing a public environment that works for Wilmington.

Chapter 3

REVITALIZATION THROUGH REHABILITATION: THE PROBLEM OF GENTRIFICATION

Urban renewal programs of the 1950s aimed to fix urban problems with slum clearance followed by private development. However, by the mid-1960s, the National Historic Preservation Act condemned the wholesale clearance of city blocks, focusing on using old buildings to promote reinvestment in urban areas. Since the 1960s, the rehabilitation of historic structures has been a key component of public and private efforts to revitalize both residential and commercial urban areas. Policies at the federal, state, and local levels of government still promote private development and investment in order to encourage local economic growth. Yet, a disproportionate level of financial and professional resources are available to developer led, large-scale rehabilitation projects as compared to small-scale projects pursued by laymen. Private developers utilize funds from federal and state programs to complete rehabilitation projects intended to benefit the community. However, the primary goal of developers is to make a profit, and the most effective way to do that is making the area attractive to a more affluent audience, resulting in the displacement of the current population. Thus policies and programs in place that support revitalization through historic preservation also foster social inequality by promoting gentrification.

As with many towns and cities across the United States, Wilmington, Delaware, has utilized public and private, federal, state, and local programs in order to

support revitalization. Historically, Market Street was a mixed-used area, with commercial spaces at the street level and residential spaces in the upper floors. By the second half of the twentieth century, the City of Wilmington's adoption of zoning code required areas to be "zoned" for specific uses, such as commercial, residential, and industrial. Market Street was zoned commercial, resulting in a ban on mixed-use. However, this early zoning greatly limited options for redevelopment. Today, the Market Street area is zoned "C-3" or Central Commercial.⁸⁰ While still technically zoned commercial, the C-3 district includes any use permitted under the C-2, or secondary business commercial center district, which allows for R-5-C districts, which are "designed to encourage large high-rise apartment houses in those locations where relatively high land values and convenience to downtown areas would make such buildings the best economic use of the land."⁸¹

In recent years the city and private real estate developers have identified the Market Street corridor as a key commercial, residential, and social center where investments in urban revitalization would be more effective. Development firms including Buccini/Pollin Group, Struever Bros., Eccles and Rouse, and Preservation Initiatives have redeveloped residential and commercial areas of Market Street through

⁸⁰ According Sec. 48-195 of the Wilmington, Delaware City Code, "The C-3 district, central retail, is designed for that portion of the central business area which contains the main retail district, providing a wide variety of retail and display services and serving the whole city metropolitan area."

⁸¹ "Sec. 48-139. -R-5-C districts," of Wilmington, Delaware City Code. Accessed February 2, 2011, <http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?clientId=11715&stateId=8&stateName=Delaware>.

the use of historic tax credits, and the residential population has been growing steadily since 2001. New housing units created by these developers are marketed to young professionals, aimed at bringing a new, wealthier residential population to Market Street. Meanwhile groups, such as Main Street Wilmington, have created programs such as the Façade and Signage Grant Program to encourage the rehabilitation of individual buildings by business owners. These storefronts are required to conform to design and preservation guidelines that will appeal to the new residential audience, not necessarily the existing market. All of these initiatives aim to facilitate economic growth by creating an appropriately rehabilitated historic environment.

Policies promoting preservation initially appeared to be more sensitive to the urban environment and society than urban renewal programs; however, revitalization through preservation still impacts the local community. According to the American Institute of City Planners Code of Ethics, the primary responsibility of the city planner is to serve the public interest. Special attention is called to promoting social equity through planning in Section A of the document, which states:

We shall seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration. We shall urge the alteration of policies, institutions, and decisions that oppose such needs.⁸²

Despite this emphasis on social equity, current revitalization policy favors the private developer who stands to reap the most financial gain through historic preservation.

⁸² “AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct,” American Planning Association, June 1, 2005, accessed November 11, 2010, <http://www.planning.org/ethics/ethicscode.htm>.

Along Market Street in Wilmington, speculative real estate developers own 46 percent of approximately one hundred and sixty buildings. Officially, the National Park Service suggests that the entire population benefits from the rehabilitation of historic structures, which are said to “give the community a sense of identity, stability, and orientation.”⁸³ The social impact of revitalization projects is also acknowledged within the historic preservation community. In 2008 the National Trust for Historic Preservation released the “Pocantico Proclamation on Sustainability and Historic Preservation,” which calls on policy makers to recognize that “our consumption patterns must be altered to foster social equity [and] cultural diversity.”⁸⁴ Currently, successful rehabilitation projects result in increasing real estate values both in the residential and commercial market, forcing out lower income residents and shoppers. On Market Street, which should function as a public space for the population of the entire city, revitalization will lead to social and economic segregation. This chapter examines the local, state, and federal policies and programs that promote residential and commercial gentrification.

⁸³ National Park Service, “Historic Preservation Tax Incentives,” 52-53.

⁸⁴ “Pocantico Proclamation,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, November 2008, accessed January 11, 2011, <http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/sustainability/additional-resources/Pocantico-Proclamation.pdf>.

POLICIES PROMOTING REHABILITATION

Civic culture in the United States has a long history of favoring the private pursuit of individual goals over the collective interest, a phenomenon known as privatism. Privatism has led to the creation of governmental policies that support the business community, holding that by fostering economic growth, market forces can solve social issues. Privatism has also impeded the growth of a healthy civic culture by interfering with the development of social responsibility among individuals. The ideology of privatism has especially impacted the formation of American cities, where uneven growth is a product of a capitalist economy.⁸⁵ In his analysis of the growth of the City of Philadelphia, Sam Bass Warner identifies privatism as a key factor in the development of cities:

The tradition of privatism has always meant that the cities of the United States depended for their wages, employment, and general prosperity upon the aggregate successes and failures of thousands of individual enterprises, not upon community action. It has also meant that the physical forms of American cities, their lots, houses, families, and streets, have been the outcome of a real estate market of profit-seeking builders, land speculators, and large investors.⁸⁶

Because the built environment is the result of private investment, buildings, infrastructure, and the local population suffer during times of economic hardship. Local governments struggle to control the health of the local economy to mitigate the decline of neighborhoods and commercial.

⁸⁵ Gottdiener and Hutchinson, *The New Urban Sociology*, 340.

⁸⁶ Sam Bass Warner Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 4.

When faced with declining urban areas as a result of suburban development and highway construction after World War II, federal, state, and local governments turned again to the private sector to improve urban spaces. During the 1950s, government initiated urban renewal programs aimed to revitalize “slums” by razing the area and subsidizing private development. It soon became apparent that urban renewal policies displaced the communities they were supposed to help. The built environment also suffered, as many historic structures were lost due to urban renewal policies and interstate highway construction.

A growing awareness of the negative impact of the loss of historical resources culminated in the passing of the National Historic Preservation Act on October 15, 1966. The act provided the historic preservation movement with a legal framework, identifying the importance of the nation’s historic heritage to all American people. The act also indicated a new national approach to the revitalization of the urban environment, stating, “the encouragement of [historic resource] preservation will improve the planning and execution of Federal and federally assisted projects and will assist economic growth and development.”⁸⁷ In order to clarify what constitutes as historic, the act gives the Secretary of the Interior the authorization to create a National Register of Historic Places as well as State Historic Preservation Offices to enforce legislation concerning historic properties.

⁸⁷ National Park Service, “National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 As Amended,” Federal Historic Preservation Laws, accessed October 14, 2010, www.nps.gov/history/local-law/fhpl_histprsvt.pdf, Section 1 (b, 6).

Twenty years later, in 1986, the federal government created the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive program in order to stimulate the preservation and rehabilitation of historic structures and encourage community revitalization. This program was established by the Tax Reform Act of 1986, and is jointly administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and the Internal Revenue Service in cooperation with State Historic Preservation Offices. In order to qualify for the 20 percent rehabilitation tax credit, a structure must be “certified historic.” In other words, the building must be listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or located in a registered historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A tax credit functions to lower the amount of taxes owed on the property, so that a 20 percent rehabilitation tax credit is equal to “20 percent of the amount spent in a *certified rehabilitation of a certified historic structure.*”⁸⁸

In the NPS Technical Preservation Services Brief entitled “Historic Preservation Tax Incentives,” it is clear that the program is complex and changes often, going so far as to suggest that those who wish to participate in the program obtain advice from an accountant or legal counsel. For properties that are not listed on the National Register or located in a historic district, property owners must prove to the National Park Service that their property is significant. In addition, any project that qualifies for the tax credit must follow the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for

⁸⁸ National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, “Historic Preservation Tax Incentives,” Technical Preservation Services, 2009, accessed October 10, 2010, http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/download/HPTI_brochure.pdf, 2-3.

Rehabilitation and be deemed a “certified rehabilitation” by the NPS upon completion.

Under these standards, rehabilitation is defined as,

the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of a property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values.

In order to obtain this certification, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) functions as a liaison between the building owner and the NPS. There is also a two-tiered fee structure for rehabilitation projects costing more than \$20,000 that increases based on the cost of rehabilitation.⁸⁹

In addition to the NPS Standards, in order to qualify for Federal Historic Preservation Tax incentives rehabilitated structures also must meet International Revenue Service criteria, which state that the building must be depreciable, or used as a business or to produce income. This use could include offices, industrial or agricultural purposes, or for rental housing, as long as the structure does not function as the owner’s private residence. In addition, the project must be substantial, which is defined by the IRS most simply as:

during a 24-month period selected by the taxpayer, rehabilitation expenditures must exceed the greater of \$5,000 or the adjusted basis of the building and its structural components. The adjusted basis is generally the purchase price, minus the cost of land, plus improvements already made, minus depreciation already taken. Once the substantial rehabilitation text is met, the credit may be claimed for all qualified expenditures incurred before the measuring period, during the

⁸⁹ National Park Service, “Historic Preservation Tax Incentives,” 4-5.

measuring period and after the measuring period through the end of the taxable year that the building is placed in service.⁹⁰

The complexity and length of the application process is intimidating, and these stipulations limit who can participate in the program, as a significant amount of capital investment and professional expertise are necessary to meet the required criteria. The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive program puts the responsibility for revitalization through rehabilitation squarely on the shoulders of private developers as the only parties who have the expertise and capital to invest in historic structures.

Just as federal urban renewal policies required urban areas to have a comprehensive plan in order to take advantage of federal money, Historic Preservation Tax Incentives require cities to apply the National Preservation Act to their historic resources in order to identify individual buildings eligible for the National Historic Register and entire areas eligible as historic districts. As a small city, Wilmington did not develop a separate historic commission, but in 1974, City Historic District legislation incorporated the Design Review and Planning Commission (DRPC) within the existing Planning Department.⁹¹ Currently, Wilmington's DRPC functions to fulfill the following goals:

1. to assure the incorporation of historic resources data into land use development planning decisions in the City of Wilmington
2. to aid the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in evaluating effects to National Register-eligible resources caused by federally funded and/or permitted projects

⁹⁰ National Park Service, "Historic Preservation Tax Incentives," 9-10.

⁹¹ Department of Planning, "A City-Wide Plan," February 2003, 52-53

3. to provide technical assistance to the public and to government offices about historic preservation issues
4. to identify and develop resource protection strategies
5. to develop public awareness for preservation issues and tax act opportunities⁹²

As of the 2003 City-Wide Land Use Plan, Wilmington had forty-five individual structures and fourteen historic districts on the National Register. Two of those historic districts are found along Market Street. The Lower Market Street Historic District and Extension extends from the 100 block to the 300 block, while the “Historic Resources of Market Street” references the area between the 400 block and the 900 block. The designation of these areas as historic districts was intended to emphasize the role of Market Street in the City of Wilmington’s economic history, draw attention to the significant collection of structures along Market Street that represent the social and cultural history of the city from eighteenth century to the current day, and identify Market Street as a key component to the economic health of the downtown business district.⁹³ The Market Street Historic District Design Guidelines does include a section on economic hardship, indicating that the DRPC will base its recommendations for preservation on “the applicant’s needs and resources, while basing its decisions on historical, architectural, aesthetic and legal considerations,” in order to find a cost-effective solution.⁹⁴

⁹² Department of Planning, “A City-Wide Plan,” February 2003, 52.

⁹³ City Planning Department, “Market Street,” 16.

⁹⁴ Department of Planning, “Market Street,” 9.

Early revitalization along Market Street, such as the restoration of the Grand Opera House at 818 Market Street in 1973, did not have the support of historic tax credits; however, recent revitalization has had support from both federal and state historic tax credits. In 2001, the General Assembly of the State of Delaware enacted the Delaware Historic Preservation Tax Act in order to stimulate private sector involvement in preserving historic structures in Delaware.⁹⁵ The Program was first authorized at \$30 million over a ten-year period, or \$3 million for each state fiscal year, but was increased to \$5 million for each fiscal year for 2006 through 2010.⁹⁶ The program was extended for another ten years from 2011 through 2020 at \$5 million each fiscal year.⁹⁷ To date, over \$34.5 million in historic tax credit dollars have been awarded to eighty-eight different building rehabilitation projects, providing leverage for \$167.5 million in investment.⁹⁸

The State Tax Credit Program has many of the same prerequisites as the Federal Tax Incentive Program, requiring adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, certification as a historic property, and "substantial"

⁹⁵ Title 30 State Taxes, Chapter 18 Land and Historic Resource Tax Credit, Subchapter II Historic Preservation and Repair, of the Delaware Code. <http://delcode.delaware.gov/title30/c018/sc02/index.shtml>

⁹⁶ The State of Delaware's fiscal year begins on July 1.

⁹⁷ Delaware Department of State, State Historic Preservation Office, "Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program Statistics, October 29, 2010, obtained via email correspondence with Joan Larrivee.

⁹⁸ State Historic Preservation Office, "Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program Statistics."

qualified expenditures during the course of rehabilitation. While federal incentives equal 20 percent of the cost of rehabilitation for depreciable properties, Delaware's Historic Tax Credits are equal to 20 percent of the cost of rehabilitation for income-producing buildings, 30 percent for owner-occupied residential buildings, and an additional 10 percent for low-income housing. In addition, the credits can be sold, transferred, or assigned to outside parties so long as they have a Delaware income tax or franchise tax liability in order to offset those tax liabilities.⁹⁹ Of the eighty-eight buildings rehabilitated with State Historic Preservation Tax Credits, fifty are in Wilmington, and thirty-three of those are located on Market Street. Of those thirty-three buildings, thirty-two have been rehabilitated by developers.¹⁰⁰ The credit award for those projects totaled \$21.5 million representing 66 percent of the \$34.8 million awarded statewide.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Delaware Department of State, State Historic Preservation Office, "Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program, Program Guidance," March 30, 2005, accessed October 10, 2010, http://history.delaware.gov/services/TaxIncentives_Guid_Apps/HTCguid_brochure.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ The thirty-third building rehabilitated with State Historic Tax Credits was Old Town Hall, which is owned by the Delaware Historical Society.

¹⁰¹ Numbers provided by Delaware Department of State, State Historic Preservation Office, statistics calculated by author.

Project Name	Project Location	# Bldgs.	Bldg. Use	Project Costs	Credit Award	Award FY
Ships Tavern, Market St.	Wilmington	18	Commercial/Apts	\$22,759,984	\$4,129,200	2001 2002
Delaware Trust Building	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Apts	\$38,723,500	\$7,744,700	2004- 2006
300 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Office	\$1,664,172	\$332,800	2007
302 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Office	\$1,430,367	\$286,100	2007
304 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Office	\$1,343,525	\$268,700	2007
306 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Office	\$1,547,270	\$309,500	2007
308-312 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Office	\$3,342,692	\$668,500	2007
314 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Office	\$1,453,550	\$290,700	2007
316 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Office	\$1,261,979	\$252,400	2007
318 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Office	\$2,581,750	\$516,350	2008
421 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Apts	\$2,288,560	\$457,712	2007, 2008
423 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Apts	\$1,525,705	\$305,141	2007 2008
426 North Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Apts	\$4,270,000	\$854,000	2008
500 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Theater/Comm.	\$22,337,075	\$4,467,415	2008 2009
400 N. Market Street	Wilmington	1	Commercial/Apts	\$2,900,000	\$580,000	2009
Old Town Hall	Wilmington	1	Museum	\$521,253	\$156,376	2009 2010
TOTALS		33		\$109,951,382	\$21,619,594	

Table 3.1 Delaware Historic Tax Credits used along Market Street, 2001-2010

Without policies and programs promoting historic preservation at the federal and state level, the revitalization of historic properties along Market Street would have been financially impossible. Tax credit programs were an integral factor in the rehabilitation of properties along Market Street, however the complexity of the tax credit process, rehabilitation requirements, and the capital required to take advantage of these programs created a system that was exclusively available to professional developers. Although these programs were intended for the good of the entire community, developers had to make a profit, resulting in rehabilitation projects designed to attract a middle and upper class residential and commercial population.

RESIDENTIAL GENTRIFICATION

The first major developer led project on Market Street was called the Ships Tavern Mews, which included all of the buildings on the west side of the 200 block of North Market Street. Although Market Street as a whole suffered from economic decline through the late twentieth century, lower Market Street suffered the most, as it was geographically the furthest from Wilmington's modern economic center. Through the later part of the twentieth century, lower Market Street accommodated institutions that were a reflection of its decline. In 1968 the National Guard was housed in the lower Market Street area, and through the 1970s and 80s, the area was home to many community aid organizations. By 1998, occupancy of the 200 block was so low, and the physical structures were in such disrepair that it was purchased by the City of Wilmington. In June 2001 it was turned over to WRDC Phase I LLC, the now defunct development branch of the Wilmington Renaissance

Corporation.¹⁰² The developer chosen for the project was Streuver Bros., Eccles & Rouse of Baltimore (SBER), a redevelopment firm with the motto “transforming America’s Cities, neighborhood by neighborhood.”¹⁰³ In September of that year, Market Street Mews LLC, or SBER, acquired the block, branding it “Ships Tavern Mews” after an eighteenth century tavern once located along the block.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Limited Liability Corporations or LLCs are a common strategy used by developers to limit liability in real estate investment projects. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a LLC, or Limited Liability Corporation “are an increasingly common ownership structure for multi-family properties. A typical... LLC consists of the developer (or an affiliate) as the managing member, and the credit purchaser as an additional (non-managing) member. The managing member has a small percentage ownership interest (often below 1 percent), but has the responsibility to manage the affairs of the partnership, arrange for the management of the property, and make most of the day-to-day operating decisions. The non-managing member has a large percentage ownership interest (often well above 99 percent), and has a passive investor role. All members of an LLC have liability that is limited to the amount invested. That is, if a disaster occurs, the most they can lose is the amount invested. The rights and obligations of the partners are described in an LLC Operating Agreement. Typically the non-managing members do not participate in day-to-day operating decisions but do participate in major decisions such as decisions to sell or refinance the property.”

¹⁰³ Streuver Bros. Eccles & Rouse, “Corporate Brochure,” 2006, accessed October 8, 2010, http://www.sber.com/downloads/sber_corporate_brochure.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ Maureen Milford, “Wilmington, Del., to renew a Key Historic Area,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1999, accessed October 8, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com>.



Figure 3.1 The 200 block in 1989 (*courtesy Delaware Historical Society Archives*)

The Ships Tavern Mews project involved rehabilitating and converting eighteen separate buildings into one, although the buildings still appear to be individual structures from the street. The mixed-use project consists of nineteen retail and office spaces on the ground floor with eighty-six apartment units above. The project cost totaled \$22.8 million, which was supplemented by \$4.1 million in state historic tax credits awarded during FY 2001 and 2002, as well as federal historic tax credits.¹⁰⁵ In addition to historic tax credits, SBER utilized Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits to generate money to finance the project. Of the eighty-six

¹⁰⁵ Numbers provided by Delaware Department of State, State Historic Preservation Office, statistics calculated by author. State Tax Credits were sold to fund project.

apartment units in the Ships Tavern Mews project, thirty-nine are subsidized by the federal government to accommodate low-income occupants. Anyone who makes less than \$34,000 a year qualifies for a subsidized one-bedroom apartment, and less than \$43,000 a year qualifies for a subsidized two-bedroom apartment.¹⁰⁶ Subsidized units range in price from \$675 a month for a one-bedroom unit to \$1,000 a month for a two-bedroom unit. The program, which remains in place for fifteen years from the completion of the project, is administered by the Delaware State Housing Authority.



Figure 3.2 Ships Tavern Mews (*photograph by author, taken February 8, 2011*)

¹⁰⁶ The developer was required to include subsidized units in the project because they used New Market Tax Credits, which are summarized in Appendix X.

Despite the low-income housing component, the Struever Bros. brochure promoting the Market Street Mews project is clearly aimed at a professional audience, emphasizing the geographic proximity to cultural institutions and major transportation corridors. Ships Tavern Mews is identified as “in the heart of a cultural mecca,” consisting of the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts and the Delaware Theater Company.¹⁰⁷ Regional transportation networks including the Amtrak station and easy access to I-95 are identified as ideal, especially as Wilmington’s location is “at the midpoint of the east coast corridor between Boston and Richmond.”¹⁰⁸ News Journal reporter Adam Taylor interviewed the Ships Tavern Mews site manager Nikki Lane for the article “Market Street’s Rebirth Near,” published on April 15, 2003. Lane indicated that “single professionals and married couples without children have been targeted as tenants.”¹⁰⁹ The price of apartment units are also clearly aimed at the professional audience. For market rate units, one bedroom apartments range from \$800-\$1,100 and two bedroom apartments range from \$1,200-\$1,500.¹¹⁰ Since the completion of the project, units have been at about 90 percent occupancy. In a follow up article, Taylor summarizes the intent of the Market Street Mews, writing “The theory is that restaurants, boutiques and art galleries will follow the lead of the new

¹⁰⁷ Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse, “Ships Tavern Mews,” 2006, accessed October 8, 2010, http://www.sber.com/downloads/2008_shipstavern.pdf.

¹⁰⁸ Struever Bros., “Ships Tavern Mews.”

¹⁰⁹ Adam Taylor, “Market Street’s Rebirth Near,” *The News Journal*, April 15, 2003, accessed October 8, 2010, <http://proquest.umi>.

¹¹⁰ Information obtained via email conversation with Christian Winburn on 11/4/2010.

residents and locate along lower Market Street.”¹¹¹ Despite the use of Low Income Housing Tax Credits in the Ships Tavern Mews Project, it is clear that the developers still aimed to gentrify the area. For the developer, media, and local government, the success of the project is determined by the size of the professional population and presence of higher end retail.

While the Ships Tavern project focused on revitalizing Lower Market Street, the rehabilitation of the Delaware Trust Building in the 900 block focused on bringing residential options to upper Market Street. Buccini/Pollin Group (BPG), a real estate investment, development, and management firm, acquired the Delaware Trust building in June 2002 with plans to convert the 1928 Greek Revival office building to a high-end apartment building. The \$38.7 million project was called the Residences at Rodney Square. Without the help of \$7.7 million in state historic tax credits awarded between FY 2004 and 2006 in addition to federal historic tax credits the rehabilitation would not have been economically viable.¹¹² The 280 studio, one, and two-bedroom apartment units are marketed to professionals, both working in and commuting out of Wilmington. According to the BPG website, “The quality, location and amenities of this project are unrivaled in the marketplace.”¹¹³ The quality,

¹¹¹ Adam Taylor, “In the Spotlight,” *The News Journal*, September 8, 2003, accessed October 8, 2010, <http://proquest.umi>.

¹¹² Numbers provided by Delaware Department of State, State Historic Preservation Office, statistics calculated by author.

¹¹³ Buccini/Pollin Group, “The Residences at Rodney Square,” accessed November 3, 2010, <http://www.bpgroup.net/residences-rodney-square.htm>.

location and amenities offered are reflected in the monthly cost to rent a unit, starting at \$919 for a studio, \$1185 for a one bedroom, and \$1309 for a two bedroom.¹¹⁴ However, BPG did find a new market, reflected in a 98 percent occupancy rate achieved after 18 months.¹¹⁵

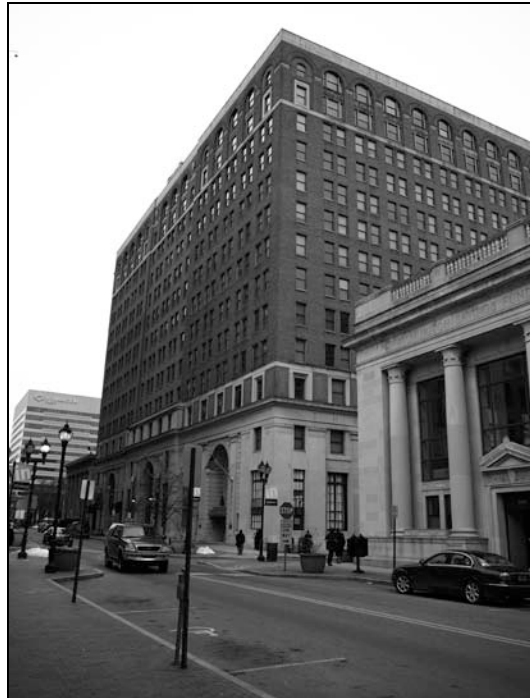


Figure 3.3 Residences at Rodney Square (*photograph by author, taken February 8, 2011*)

¹¹⁴ “The Residences at Rodney Square,” *Apartment Guide*, accessed December 5, 2010, <http://www.apartmentguide.com/apartments/Delaware/Wilmington/The-Residences-At-Rodney-Square/34963/>.

¹¹⁵ Robert and Christopher Buccini. Interviewed by Jenifer Grindle Dolde. Market Street Oral History Project. Historical Society of Delaware Archives. June 26, 2007.

The Residences at Rodney Square and the Market Street Mews projects are very different types of residential development spearheaded by two very different types of developers. SBER was an out of town developer brought to Wilmington by a unique adaptive reuse project that would benefit the community by “transforming” Wilmington while generating a profit. BPG became involved with the revitalization of Market Street for more personal reasons. Brothers Robert and Chris Buccini grew up in Wilmington, and are now principals in BPG. One of BPG’s headquarters is located in Wilmington, and the firm has pursued multiple residential and commercial development opportunities along Market Street and the Riverfront. During an oral history interview conducted by the Delaware Historical Society in 2004, Chris Buccini shared his personal views on the redevelopment of Market Street:

I mean the cost-effective way of redeveloping Market Street is to knock everything down. But you’d never want to do that, you really—and that’s what makes Market Street so special. And in today’s world, you know the retail world, the big thing is town centers and lifestyle centers and everyone wants to sort of recreate Market Street or Main Street USA out in the suburbs. Well, there’s a reason why people want to recreate it, because Main Street USA is such a special place and so what we’re trying to do with Market Street, Wilmington is bring it back to its heyday of when it was a Main Street, USA. And so to do that you want to really restore and maintain the historic nature of the architecture and it’s spectacular architecture. It’s diverse, it’s exciting, it’s intricate, it’s beautiful.¹¹⁶

As real estate developers, business decisions for both BPG and Streuver Bros. are driven by the bottom line. However, a more in depth look at motivations for

¹¹⁶ Robert and Christopher Buccini. Interviewed by Jenifer Grindle Dolde. Market Street Oral History Project. Historical Society of Delaware Archives. June 26, 2007.

involvement reveals that both parties believe that revitalization through gentrification is the only way to “save” the American city.

Local, state, and federal government policies encourage developers to try to “fix” Wilmington by attracting a new population, not through working with the city’s current population and addressing major social problems. Because of the large scale of the Residences at Rodney Square and the Ships Tavern Mews, the two structures function as residential anchors at the top and bottom of Market Street that stand in stark contrast to residential opportunities within the Market Street area and nearby neighborhoods. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the median contract rent in Census Tract 1 is \$450, in Census Tract 16 is \$467, and in Census Tract 21 is only \$329.¹¹⁷ These figures stand in sharp contrast with the rents at the Residences at Rodney Square, and even the rates of the Low Income Tax Credit subsidized units at Ships Tavern Mews which cost \$675 a month for a one bedroom apartment and \$1,000 a month for a two bedroom. This price comparison highlights the new socioeconomic population the city and developers are trying to attract to the Market Street area.

¹¹⁷ Census Tract 1 encompasses the Market Street area and much of the Central Business District. Census Tract 16 is roughly made up by the Trinity Vicinity and north sections of West Center City and Quaker Hill neighborhoods, while Census Tract 21 is made up of the southern section of West Center City and Quaker Hill.

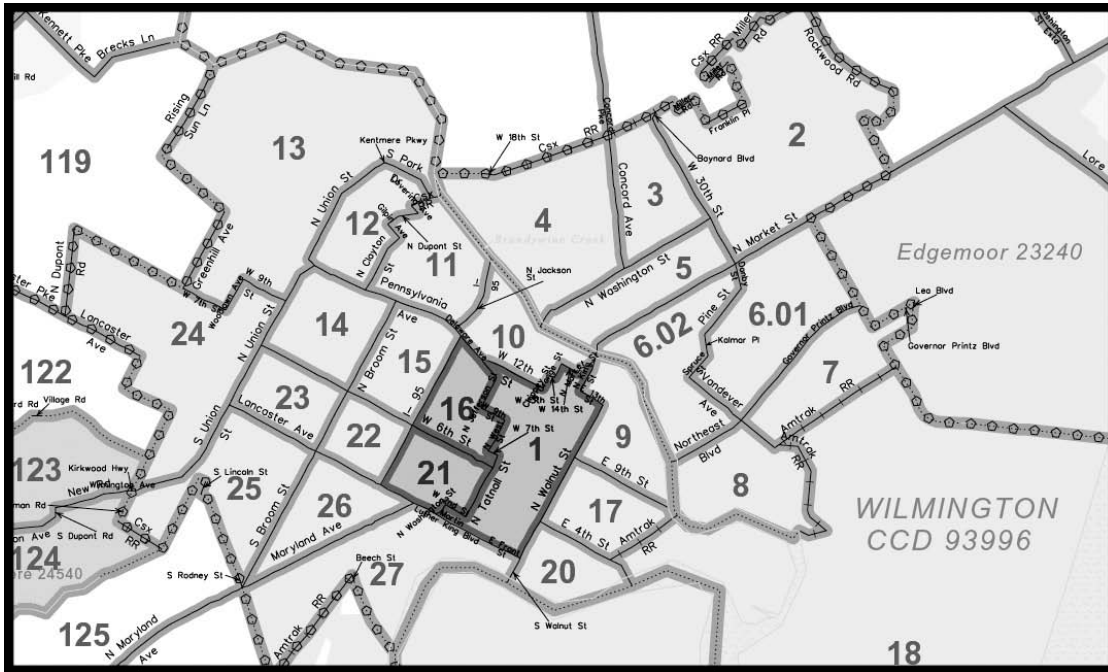


Figure 3.4 Market Street areas census tracts (courtesy U.S. Census Bureau, *Census Tract Outline Map (Census 2000)*)

The increasing trend towards residential gentrification will eventually lead to commercial gentrification as wealthier residents become patrons of higher-end restaurants and retail. Although the commercial landscape has not yet gentrified, other changes have resulted from the evolving socio-economic makeup of residents in the Market Street area. In April 2010 plans were announced to relocate Wilmington’s main bus transit stop at Rodney Square to a location on Shipley Street between Eighth and Ninth Streets that is currently occupied by a parking garage. According to a News Journal Article, “The move would end years of frustration for nearby businesses and for city officials who think the vehicles play a major role in turning Wilmington’s

town square into a dirty bus stop full of panhandlers who make many people afraid to go there.”¹¹⁸ Mayor James M. Baker stated that moving the bus hub, “would go a long way toward turning the square from an embarrassment into a source of pride.”¹¹⁹ As the Market Street area becomes home to a higher-social economic group, the built environment is changing in response. Currently Rodney Square is a public park utilized by locals who use the bus transit system. Moving the bus hub out of the public eye is an early indicator of who will be welcome on Market Street once the revitalization process is complete.

COMMERCIAL GENTRIFICATION AND THE EVOLVING COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPE

Since Willingtown was established in the early eighteenth century, Market Street has functioned as a continually changing commercial district. Businesses succeeded and failed in response to an evolving economic and social landscape. Historically, business turnover was an organic process, and stores went out of business when they no longer served the needs of the population. However, businesses that serve the current urban population are controlled by forces larger than the economy. Because Market Street is a historic district, business owners must follow a set of design guidelines that control the appearance of their buildings. New businesses in redeveloped areas of Market Street must be in keeping with the developer’s vision for

¹¹⁸ Adam Taylor, “Clearing Rodney Square’s Air,” *The News Journal*, April 30, 2010, accessed November 7, 2010, <http://www.proquest.umi>.

¹¹⁹ Adam Taylor, “Clearing Rodney Square’s Air.”

a revitalized main street. The demands of the increasing residential professional population are very different from the needs of much of the population in surrounding neighborhoods. Developers anticipating a future market based on residential gentrification also control the future of the commercial landscape, which will result in the displacement of many current businesses and customers from Market Street once the goals for revitalization are met.

Commercial gentrification is an acknowledged result of revitalization projects in business districts. The effects of commercial gentrification are two fold. Increasing real estate values can force out local businesses, while up-scale incoming businesses can create an environment that is not welcoming to the entire urban population because they are geared to a wealthier clientele. Therefore, during commercial gentrification, both businesses and local customers can be displaced. In a Main Street publication entitled “Commercial District Gentrification,” local ownership of commercial spaces is promoted as the “single best defense against gentrification.”¹²⁰ Given that almost half of the building stock along Market Street is owned by private developers, commercial gentrification seems inevitable.

An understanding of how the Market Street has changed through history offers insight into what redevelopers are attempting to recreate in the twenty first century. Perhaps the best overview of the historic commercial landscape along Market Street is provided by Ellen Rendle’s work, *The Ghosts of Market Street: Merchants of*

¹²⁰ Joshua Bloom, “Commercial Distirct Gentrification,” *Revitalizing Main Street: A Practitioner’s Guide to Commercial District Revitalization*, accessed October 29, 2010, http://www.preservation.org/main-street/resources/public/RMS_Gentrification.pdf

Yesteryear. By examining historic Wilmington City Directories, Rendle explores the changing business landscape. As early as 1814, Market Street was home to “fourteen dry goods, thirteen grocers, five jewelers, seven hardware stores and three bookstores.”¹²¹ As Wilmington’s economy changed, Market Street remained a place for the public to socialize, shop, and conduct business. Although specific businesses grew and changed, especially with the introduction of department stores and chain stores, Market Street remained a thriving business district into the 1960s.



Figure 3.5 Early nineteenth century Market Street, (*courtesy Delaware Historical Society Archives*)

¹²¹ Ellen Rendle, *The Ghosts of Market Street: Merchants of Yesteryear*, (Wilmington, DE: Cedar Tree Books, 1998), 2.

As the years pass by, fewer and fewer people remember the Market Street during its booming years, and more have memories of its decline. Forces contributing to the decline of the commercial district include the growing shift of the population to the suburbs as well as civil unrest through the 1960s. Although the downtown working population shopped during their lunch hours, it was mainly for personal items.¹²² Middle and upper class workers did not linger after work hours, or frequent downtown on the weekends, leaving a population in the city too poor to support many of the remaining downtown businesses.

Some businesses along Market Street have survived through the decline because they cater to a broad audience. Al's Sporting Goods, originally Al's Pawn Shop, has been a consistent presence in Lower Market Street for over fifty years. Although the store is now located in a brand new structure at 200 Market Street, not their historic home at 206-210, the business still draws suburban and urban shoppers for their selection of athletic equipment. Govatos Chocolates, founded in 1894 in Wilmington, has been located at its current location at 800 Market Street since the 1910s.¹²³ Leo and Jimmy's Deli at 728 Market Street was founded in the early 1950s, and moved to 728 Market Street in the early 1970s.¹²⁴ James Hackett, the owner of

¹²² Rendle, *The Ghosts of Market Street*, 61.

¹²³ Govatos Chocolates, "History," accessed November 24, 2010, <http://www.govatoschocolates.com/home.htm>.

¹²⁴ Jimmy Hackett, owner of Leo & Jimmy's Delicatessen. Interviewed by Jenifer Grindle Dolde. Market Street Oral History Project. Historical Society of Delaware Archives. June 7, 2007.

Leo & Jimmy's, purchased the building in 1995. Newer businesses such as a Brew Ha Ha Espresso Café and Qdoba Mexican restaurant, which opened in late 2008, have also been successful, although they do adapt their hours to fit with customer demand.¹²⁵ Many stores and restaurants are only open between Monday and Friday during business hours, although as more people move to the Market Street area, hours are expanding to nights and weekends.

In May of 2005, Wilmington Mayor James Baker co-authored an article published in the *News Journal* promoting Wilmington's downtown as a place, "on the verge of being a 24-hour city thriving with businesses large and small; outstanding cultural activities for people of all ages; beautiful residential options, and a unique mix of residents with a spirit of urban pioneerism."¹²⁶ The purpose of the article was to promote a half-day program presented by the Wilmington Renaissance Corporation and the City of Wilmington entitled "The Experience Economy: Creating a Lasting Impression." The program featured author James H. Gilmore, who presented his theory on the modern economy; that in order to be successful, businesses must create memorable events that become an experience that can be marketed to the consumer.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Patricia Talorico, "Qdoba: Light on the Wallet, Heavy on the Rice," *The News Journal*, May 8, 2009, accessed November 22, 2010, <http://proquest.umi>.

¹²⁶ James M. Baker, and William C. Wyr, "Positive changes brewing in city," *The News Journal*, May 5, 2005, accessed December 4, 2010, <http://proquest.umi>.

¹²⁷ B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*, (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 1999), 2.

The partnership between the WRC and the City of Wilmington reflects a shift in the responsibility for revitalization from the city to private initiatives. Although Wilmington's Department of Planning and Department of Economic Development are still involved in approving rehabilitation projects and bringing new businesses to Wilmington, the city has facilitated the creation of non-profit groups to supplement developer led efforts. Groups such as Downtown Visions, the Wilmington Renaissance Corporation, and Main Street Wilmington all play a role in the redevelopment of Market Street. Early developer led projects, such as the Ships Tavern Mews, proved that rehabilitating historic buildings could improve the appearance of Market Street. In the face of large scale, developer led rehabilitation, the city and nonprofit organizations have promoted programs that aid historic rehabilitation at a smaller scale for individual business and property owners.

In 2005, Main Street Wilmington approached Retail Market Answers LLC to help produce a Strategic Merchandizing Plan (SMP) for Market Street between Second and Tenth Street and the Ninth Street corridor. The Strategic Merchandizing Plan included a Gap analysis as well as a demographic market assessment.¹²⁸ Through examining income levels and population thresholds in the Wilmington Area,

¹²⁸ The SMP explanation of the Gap analysis approach: "The Gap analysis examines the 'demand' (consumer expenditures) for a wide variety of retail goods and services and compared this data to the retail sales for the same goods and services ('supply', if you will). Generally speaking, when consumer expenditures exceed retail sales this is an indication that consumers are buying these goods and services from outside the area. We found numerous categories of goods and services that appear to be under-supplied in the Wilmington Primary Trade area, thus ripe for new business development."

the SMP finds Market Street most suitable for “mid-range and lower socio-economic retail goods and services models... consistent with many of the current downtown retail goods and service providers.”¹²⁹ The SMP also states there is potential for higher end establishments if businesses exploit the daytime commuter population and draw from areas outside of the city limits. The primary goal of the SMP is “to maximize the opportunities presented by a large workforce population and strong regional demographic attributes.”¹³⁰ This goal confirms that Main Street Wilmington and developer led commercial redevelopment is focused on revitalizing the area by bringing in higher end retail establishments.

However, the needs of customers who live in lower socioeconomic areas of Wilmington and professionals living or working in the downtown area are drastically different. Wilmington’s residential population consists of approximately 74,000 individuals. In addition to this local population, the SMP also focuses on the daytime commuter population, which is estimated at approximately 45,000.¹³¹ The SMP focuses on identifying money that is being spent outside of the local economy, in order to decide what businesses to locate in the target area. The demographic analysis breaks the local population into residents located in one, three, and five-mile radius from Ninth and Market Streets. Within the one-mile radius area, the population is estimated at 35,046 with a median household income of \$37,149. Within a three-mile

¹²⁹ Retail Market Answers, LLC, “Strategic Merchandising Plan,” 3.

¹³⁰ Retail Market Answers, LLC, “Strategic Merchandising Plan,” 3.

¹³¹ Retail Market Answers, LLC, “Strategic Merchandising Plan,” 2.

radius, the population is at 109,676 with a median income of \$42,212. At the five-mile radius, the population is at 189,930, with a median income of \$49,591.

Different types of businesses serve the lower socio-economic groups located within walking distance of Market Street, as opposed to the middle and upper class professional socio-economic group targeted by the SMP. Developing businesses that can bridge this social and economic gap is a huge challenge that was commented on by Delaware historian Barbara Benson. “Yes, young yuppie sophisticates and aging black working class people are not natural affinity groups for sharing activities and stores because they want different things and need different things. I mean one person needs a pair of socks and the other wants a vanilla latte you know. It’s sort of different worlds.”¹³² Instead of addressing these disparities and working towards developing businesses along Market Street that serve the entire population, the SMP focuses on bringing high-end businesses to Market Street while moving businesses located on Market Street that serve lower socio-economic groups.

¹³² Barbara Benson and Carol Hoffecker, interviewed by the author, University of Delaware Center for Historic Architecture and Design Archives, August 8, 2010.



Figure 3.6 Map showing area within one, three, and five miles of the intersection of Ninth and Market Streets

One existing business targeted by the SMP is Diamond Cuts, a barbershop that serves local black men located on the southwest corner of Forth and Market Streets, directly across from a major redevelopment project. In 2009, the entire east side of the 300 block was rehabilitated by Preservation Initiatives as a commercial and office mixed-use complex called Lincoln Square. The SMP identifies the structure as “in need of capital reinvestment,” and is criticized because the building, “will not contribute as a pedestrian drawing factor,” which is perceived as harming the areas success at revitalization.¹³³ The report suggests that the building owner “rethink the

¹³³ Retail Market Answers, LLC, “Strategic Merchandising Plan,” 31.

current use and occupancy in the context of serving the 35,000 square feet of anticipated new commercial office employees, in addition to the new residential base in the area.”¹³⁴ The owner of the building has indicated they are happy with Diamond Cuts as a business tenant, and has indicated no desire upgrade their current business, despite the SMP suggestion that the owner consider looking at converting the space to serve as a specialty food or retail store. Interestingly, the Lincoln Square project has stood virtually vacant since its opening, while the Diamond Cuts barber shop has remained open and continues to serve their existing customer base.



Figure 3.7 Diamond Cuts Barbershop at the southwest corner of Fourth and Market Streets (*photograph by author, taken February 8, 2011*)

¹³⁴ Retail Market Answers, LLC, “Strategic Merchandising Plan,” 31.



Figure 3.8 Lincoln Square Project, (*photograph by author, taken October 17, 2010*)

The Strategic Merchandising Report continues to criticize businesses along Market Street, especially in the 600 and 700 block, that target “a mid to low socio-economic shopper,” as eyesores that interfere with current economic revitalization. Current businesses that are critiqued for their poor signage, window displays, and façade condition include Lucky Nails at 614 Market, Kennedy Fried Chicken at 618 Market, Crazy Discount at 611 Market, and Discount General Merchandise at 613 Market. Along the seven hundred block, Lou Jewelry and Pawn at 712, Miller’s Check Cashing at 718, and Fashion Place at 715-717, are discussed as businesses that “could be located nearby and maintain [their] presence (and customer base) in the market.”¹³⁵ Although the report affirms that businesses that target local

¹³⁵ Retail Market Answers, LLC, “Strategic Merchandising Plan,” 41-44.

and community shoppers are appropriate for the market, they suggest these businesses relocate to sites near Market Street, so that businesses “capable of drawing [customers] from outside of the downtown” can locate along Market Street.¹³⁶

In order to facilitate some of the capital improvements suggested by the Strategic Marketing Plan, Main Street Wilmington developed the Façade and Signage Grant Program. According to the document produced for interested businesses, “This program will improve the quality and visual impact of our downtown structures, foster working relationships between the public and private sector, and ultimately increase Wilmington’s business base and desirability.”¹³⁷ The externally funded grant program would provide small businesses with a matching grant up to \$25,000 per façade. While intended to assist businesses who cannot commit the financial resources to a large-scale tax credit project, it is also is an attack on the current commercial culture. By requiring historically sensitive improvements, the City and Main Street Wilmington are telling select business owners that their method of marketing their store through signage and window displays is inadequate and unattractive. The Façade and Signage Grant Program promotes a historic preservation based design aesthetic that is intended to encourage gentrification, not support the existing commercial culture.

¹³⁶ Retail Market Answers, LLC, “Strategic Merchandising Plan,” 40.

¹³⁷ Main Street Wilmington, “Façade & Signage Grant Program,” accessed July 13, 2010, <http://mainstreetwilmingtonde.org/Websites/mainstreetwilmington/Images/FacadeSignageGrantProgram.pdf>.

Although Market Street has been a historic district since the 1980s, many of the changes that have been made to commercial structures do not conform to the design guidelines supported by the Design Review and Planning Commission. The Façade and Signage Grant Program was created to address “undesirable” design elements including crowded window displays or total lack of window displays, vinyl awnings, inappropriate signage, an overabundance of signage, as well as deteriorating materials or materials that are not historically appropriate as determined by the DRPC. Technically, it is within the Licenses & Inspections Department (L&I) power to cite the building owner for changes made to buildings without a building permit, however years of historically inappropriate changes have been overlooked by the city, resulting in the design of each façade reflecting the personal decisions of the entrepreneur.

In the fall of 2009, Main Street Wilmington Design Committee approached L&I to see if it they could partner to contact building and business owners before any violations were issued to building owners. The idea was to make the Main Street Façade and Signage Grant program more attractive to business owners by showing them what the city could fine them for, and what MSW could help them fix before receiving a violation. However, there was a misunderstanding, and instead L&I sent out all of their inspectors who cited buildings along Market Street for violations, creating an atmosphere of hostility between the commercial community and the City. Since the violations were issued, L&I has not worsened the situation by issuing more

finer, but allowed business owners to wait for grant money; however, businesses were forced to address historic district design related concerns.¹³⁸

In order to qualify for the Façade and Signage grant program, applicants are required to fill out an application including a written description of the proposed improvements, three photographs of the building as it exists, design plans, and cost estimates signed by a contractor.¹³⁹ Because businesses along Market Street are within the Market Street Historic District, proposals must also go through the Planning Department's Design Review and Preservation Commission as well as the Department of Licenses and Inspections to receive building permits.¹⁴⁰ The process is multi-step and intimidating, and often it is difficult for a business owner to see what exactly is wrong with a vinyl awning or other undesirable building feature. Although private building and business owners must go through the same process to acquire a building permit as large developers, developers have a larger staff and higher level of expertise. Interestingly, it was the presence of beautifully rehabilitated developer led projects along Market Street that prompted both Main Street Wilmington and the City to finally require the same standards of the rest of the built environment.

Refurbishing historic buildings is an expensive process, and rental rates in redeveloped spaces are higher than other available commercial spaces. In addition,

¹³⁸ Information obtained via email conversation with Rachel Royer on November 4, 2010.

¹³⁹ Main Street Wilmington, "Façade & Signage Grant Program."

¹⁴⁰ See Appendix X for the process for obtaining a building permit within a Wilmington Historic District.

developers control what types of businesses occupy refurbished spaces. These two factors result in higher-end businesses occupying developer-rehabilitated spaces as compared to buildings owned by individuals.

The Ships Tavern Mews Project is one example of developer controlled commercial spaces located along Market Street. After the rehabilitation of the 200 block by Streuver Bros. residential spaces filled up rapidly, but filling the eighteen commercial spaces at market rental rates proved more difficult. A few businesses, including Elli & Co Flooring at 203 Market Street and Subway at 225 Market Street were early occupants that remain in business, however other initially successful businesses including the Rebel Restaurant at 201 and the Coffee Bean at 239 did not last. Because the majority of commercial spaces were not bringing in rental income, Streuver Bros. were forced to auction off the mortgage for Ships Tavern Mews at cents on the dollar in May 2010.¹⁴¹ Because of the low purchase price, the new controlling party of Market Street Mews LLC was able to offer lower rents to commercial tenants and have had success filling the spaces with businesses in keeping with the original intent of the redevelopment project, focusing on attracting “restaurants, boutiques, and art galleries.” As of November 2010, the 200 block was home to eleven businesses, including a gourmet pizza restaurant, a film production co-op, offices for Downtown Visions, a photography and art gallery, a creative marketing group, an art and framing shop, an architecture and design firm, and a coffee cafe. A women’s and men’s hair salon is scheduled to arrive in January 2011. Although

¹⁴¹ Information obtained via email conversation with Christian Winburn on 11/22/2010.

207/209, 221, and 233 Market Street remain vacant, the majority of storefronts are occupied.

The developer that owns the most residential and commercial spaces along Market Street is the Buccini/Pollin Group (BPG). After completing the Residences at Rodney Square in 2006 and the Residences at Christina Landing along the Riverfront in 2007, BPG decided that the ongoing success of the two projects would depend on the commercial health of Market Street. In a 2007 oral history interview with Delaware Historical society, Robert Buccini shared:

our goal now with Market Street is to connect what we've done in the downtown of the City to the Riverfront, to connect all that together.... I think in 18 months from now you'll be able to walk from the new 500 Delaware Avenue Purebread, you know on the ground floor there we have a new...new café there. Walk down there, walk by the Hotel DuPont, walk down Market Street, you know walk all the way down to the Riverfront, you know walk the two-mile long Riverfront. And I think it's going to be a great walk. I think right now what's missing is six blocks, seven blocks on Market Street are somewhat no man's land. That's what we're going to try to change..."

In order to affect change on the commercial landscape, BPG proceeded to buy 25 buildings along Market Street between 2006 and 2008 with the intention of rehabbing them to accommodate a combination of retail, office, and residential space. So far, 214 and 605 Market Street have been rehabilitated to accommodate office space, although each space remains vacant and listed on the properties section of the BPG website. 837 Market Street was rehabilitated in 2008 and now is home to Qdoba, a successful Mexican restaurant chain. However, the economic recession impacted the redevelopment of the majority of the buildings purchased by BPG. Storefronts remain

vacant with BPG sponsored signage in the windows, awaiting potential commercial tenants.



Figure 3.9 Vacant BPG owned building at 831 Market Street (*photograph by author, taken February 8, 2011*)

BPG is sitting on their Market Street real estate assets and focusing their efforts towards the redevelopment of the Queen Theater at 500 Market Street, the future home of the music venue World Café Live. The \$22.3 million project is being made possible by \$4.5 million in historic tax credits, as well as private sponsors. The project is scheduled to be completed in spring of 2011, and is being heralded by Wilmington’s News Journal as a project that will help both “Market Street and the

Queen Theater [...] reclaim their former glory.”¹⁴² If the Queen Theater does become a popular regional music venue, it will go a long way to increase the number of people who come to Wilmington. It will make Wilmington a more popular place to live and shop, increasing the value and marketability of BPG’s other residential and commercial properties. Coupled with the other ongoing redevelopment projects along Market Street, the success of the Queen Theater could prove to be a tipping point in the creation of a new gentrified Market Street.



Figure 3.10 Queen Theater during restoration (*photograph by author, taken October 17, 2010*)

¹⁴² Bill Taylor, “Music Will Restore Soul of Market Street,” *The News Journal*, July 7, 2010, accessed October 8, 2010, <http://proquest.umi>.



Figure 3.11 Queen Theater nearing completion (*photograph by author, taken February 8, 2011*)

CONCLUSION

The Market Street landscape is currently going through another phase in its history. Although commercial main street areas historically reflected the natural economic growth or decline of an area, current policies allow for redevelopment despite the economic climate. Both public and private initiatives view private investment as the only way to bring back Market Street. Federal and state historic tax credits promote large-scale developer led rehabilitation projects that aim to gentrify the entire area, while local programs focus on bringing structures owned by individuals up to the same standards. Even though individual ownership has been established as the

best way to prevent gentrification, almost half of the structures along Market Street are owned by private developers, a reflection of the profound impact of these policies. Although gentrification will broaden the city's economic base and result in a more attractive downtown, it will also create a public environment that is tailored to the growing professional residential population, not people who currently live in the neighborhoods surrounding the Market Street area. In Wilmington, the promotion of gentrification will foster social inequality and further segregate an already segregated urban environment.

Chapter 4

THE POWER OF CREATED PLACE: THE REVITALIZED LANDSCAPE

Exploring the history of Market Street in Wilmington, Delaware has shown how organized planning and governmental policy promote gentrification through historic preservation. The landscape of Market Street continues to change as more revitalization projects are completed. A purely visual analysis of Market Street in Wilmington reveals a stratified landscape. Its nine blocks are a patchwork of developer-rehabilitated structures, weathered modified storefronts, and dilapidated abandoned buildings. Brick sidewalks and granite curbs kept clean by Downtown Visions staff form the backdrop for bold signage marketing a new lifestyle. Market Street in 2010 is a landscape in limbo, caught between a checkered past and a future inching towards gentrification. While a lot of time, research, and creativity goes into the development of revitalization projects, little time is spent exploring the visual impact of these projects on the individuals who interact with the built environment. Rehabilitated spaces communicate different messages to individuals experiencing Market Street.

An analysis of planning and policy decisions has shown that creating an attractive environment for middle and upper class groups to live and shop is the goal of many Wilmington officials, planners, and developers. In many cases, rehabilitation projects capitalize on an idealized positive memory of place and wipe out more

controversial aspects of that area or building's history. The visual cues that are manipulated to make the urban environment appear attractive, safe, and upscale can also suggest that lower socioeconomic groups are not welcome in the area. In this way, rehabilitated buildings, streetscaping, and signage function as symbols that represent the value systems and history of a privileged population. Current urban policy promotes the creation of an exclusionary environment; however, rehabilitation could be used to explore diverse urban histories and heal rifts in the modern community. Through developing an understanding of how different social groups perceive the landscape, it becomes possible to explore how rehabilitation manipulates social and economic behavior to revitalize Market Street. The future social and economic success of Market Street hinges on the successful creation of a new place by manipulating the physical appearance of the built environment in a manner that makes it accessible to every member of the population.

A purely visual analysis of the landscape is often criticized as lacking credibility because the description and analysis of any landscape is highly subjective. It is important to research and accommodate different perspectives of the same place. Within the discipline, there is ongoing tension between visual/spatial analysis and a logocentric approach.¹⁴³

The unresolved relationship of visual order to space, of the landscape's totality and the individual experience within it...reminds us that many landscape studies obscure these tensions from us. Landscape is the

¹⁴³ Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," 17.

product of many individual mental and physical acts, yet we describe it in collective terms.¹⁴⁴

“Cultural landscape studies focus most on the history of how people have used *everyday* space—buildings, rooms, streets, fields, or yards—to establish their identity, articulate their social relations, and derive cultural meaning.”¹⁴⁵ Although cultural landscape studies focus on the history of the landscape, it is the layering of the historic landscape that creates the modern environment, which contains a wealth of information on how individuals perceive and interact with everyday spaces.

The influence of objects and spaces on social interaction is established across many disciplines. The field of semiotics includes conception, or how something is perceived, “scientific modes of discourse,” and the value systems that inform social interaction.¹⁴⁶ Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure developed the concept of the sign as the foundation of semiotics. The sign consists of a signifier, or symbol, and the signified, or the concept represented by the signifier.¹⁴⁷ In the case of urban semiotics, material objects within the built environment, such as buildings, facades, streets, and public squares, are the signifier, while the signified is the social discourse

¹⁴⁴ Dell Upton, “Seen, Unseen, and Scene,” in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds: (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1997), 175.

¹⁴⁵ Paul Groth, “Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study,” in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds: (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1997), 1.

¹⁴⁶ Mark Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos, “Introduction,” in *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*, ed. Mark Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulo (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 3.

¹⁴⁷ Gottdiener, “Introduction,” 2.

that unfolds within the built environment.¹⁴⁸ Urban semiotics can also be used to examine urban plans, the designs of architects or developers, real-estate marketing, and the “urban discourse by the users of the city.”¹⁴⁹ Although urban semiotics focuses on the study of the signifier and the signified, it is relevant to urban planning because it entertains the physical and psychological impact of the urban environment on human beings.¹⁵⁰

The particular set of tools (which includes housing and urban conglomerates) of a particular society, its modes of production, and all its mores and customs represent that society’s way of conceptualizing (‘cognizing’) material reality. There is always a ‘function’, a practical aim, underlying the ‘point of view’ which establishes the relevance, or meaning, of a particular conceptualization of material reality.¹⁵¹

Because the rehabilitation projects are created from the “point of view” of developers and city officials, the built environment reflected developers’ values and goals to the broader public audience.

Urban sociologist Sharon Zukin supports this analysis of urban space in her theory of a symbolic economy that is comprised of two parallel production systems: the production of space, which involves the design, cultural meanings, and marketing themes incorporated into the design of buildings, streets, and parks, as well

¹⁴⁸ Gottdiener, “Introduction,” 3.

¹⁴⁹ Gottdiener, “Introduction,” 3.

¹⁵⁰ Martin Krampen, *Meaning in the Urban Environment*, (London: Pion Limited, 1979), 1.

¹⁵¹ Krampen, *Meaning*, 59.

as the production of symbols which is more abstract. These symbols, much like in semiotics, indicate how urban spaces should be used and who should use them.¹⁵² Zukin suggests a more holistic approach to the urban environment. “Talking about the cultures of cities in purely visual terms does not do justice to the material practices of politics and economics that create a symbolic economy. But neither does a strictly political-economic approach suggest the subtle powers of visual and spatial strategies of social differentiation.”¹⁵³

As the built environment is transformed by rehabilitation projects, aesthetic differences within the urban environment become more apparent. Newly rehabilitated buildings draw more attention to the condition of other buildings on the street. The signage and marketing utilized by new businesses can cause older businesses to look out of date and obsolete. It is even possible to observe change within the pedestrian population. An increasing number of professionals and yuppies on the street highlight the vast range of socioeconomic groups that currently patronize shops and restaurants along Market Street. While Market Street was a segregated public space during the mid twentieth century, modern Market Street is much more integrated, with a diverse population patronizing a variety of shopping opportunities. The increasing availability of rehabilitated building stock will result in more high-end businesses and residential opportunities. The presence of revitalized spaces visually signifies socioeconomic difference.

¹⁵² Zukin, “Whose Culture?” 287.

¹⁵³ Zukin, “Whose Culture?” 284.

The “subtle powers of visual and spatial strategies of social differentiation” within urban spaces are best identified through a visual analysis of the built environment. The physical structures and streetscape, as well as marketing campaigns, signage, and media representations of the space all convey messages to the individual; however, each individual brings different experiences and memories to the built environment. Examining personal reflections of Market Street establishes the vast range in opinion of what the built environment represents. Through comparing individual’s thoughts about Market Street with the visual cues that are being manipulated by revitalization, it becomes possible to interpret how revitalization manipulates memory in order to change perceptions of Market Street.

Converting Market Street from a commercial street to a pedestrian mall was one of the first attempts to create a new visual environment to attract shoppers. The transformation of Market Street from urban socioeconomic center to a consumer driven mall is not unique to Wilmington. Since the 1950, the “deconcentration” of the population, as well as commercial, political, financial, and recreational activities from the urban center has broken up the “functional unity of the central city” as a single social gathering space.¹⁵⁴ Within the modern metropolitan regions, the city center has been replaced by the shopping mall as the main gathering space, so that,

in many regions of the metropolis, everyday life and its core of sociability has been usurped by the instrumental space of Late Capitalism [the suburban shopping mall] and by the pathological

¹⁵⁴ M. Gottdiener, “Recapturing the Center: A Semiotic Analysis of Shopping Malls,” in *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*, ed. M. Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 290.

consequences of contemporary society, such as high rates of crime, which includes random street violence. The public sphere has evaporated and the space of social interaction necessary to everyday life has been surrendered to the techniques of mass marketing and the commercial control of the mall management. Instrumental spaces, such as malls, can be contrasted with city environments; the latter's public spaces are vestiges of history, it seems, because of the invasion of the city by instrumental space (e.g., Faneuil Hall, in Boston).¹⁵⁵

The central business districts in many urban areas lost vitality to local suburban malls. In an attempt to bring people back to the city, municipalities have resorted to creating a comfortable main street area, evocative of an idealized past. Main streets are no longer public places that are open to "freedom of speech, consociation and assembly. As the availability of such places diminishes or becomes restricted, so too do these fundamental rights."¹⁵⁶ If the only viable activity on main street is consumer consumption, then main street is only accessible to those who have enough expendable income to afford to consume.

THE PERCEPTION OF SAFETY

In an attempt to recreate the historic downtown as a twenty-first century social hub, downtowns have to appear to be a safe place to shop. As more and more of the built environment is beautified by developers and streetscape initiatives, the public ownership of the environment is shifting from the local population to a professional middle and upper class population. Although the local population still patronizes

¹⁵⁵ Gottdiener, "Recapturing the Center," 301.

¹⁵⁶ Gottdiener, "Recapturing the Center," 301.

businesses on Market Street that cater to them, the contrast between the rehabilitated environment and buildings in decline is mirrored in the social makeup along Market Street. “As had been true historically, the democratization of public space was entangled with the question of fear for physical security.”¹⁵⁷ The created main street landscape is intentionally socially exclusive, because a big part of helping outsiders feel safe and secure within the urban environment is keeping out those of a lower socio-economic class. In conversations with individuals who live in the suburbs of Wilmington, it rapidly becomes clear that people are afraid to come downtown, partially because of ongoing racial tension resulting from residual memories of the race riots and National Guard occupation.

Carol Hoffecker: And I think a lot of that grew out of the fear that came out of the riots in the late 60s you know. “If our employees go outside at lunch time they’ll be mugged. And so if we’re going to get the best workers to be willing to come to downtown we have to provide them with a fortress.”

[...]

Barbara Benson: I mean 30 years after those riots people would be telling me why they couldn’t come down to a program [at the Delaware Historical Society] in the city. Because it was so unsafe, and I’d think no. It’s empty maybe, but it’s not unsafe.¹⁵⁸

Helping people feel secure and safe while on Market Street has been a major goal of revitalization since the 1970s. In 1994, the introduction of the Downtown Visions

¹⁵⁷ Zukin, “Whose Culture?” 287.

¹⁵⁸ Barbara Benson and Carol Hoffecker, interviewed by the author, University of Delaware Center for Historic Architecture and Design Archives, August 8, 2010.

cleaning and safety division, outfitted in bright yellow uniforms, provided the public with visual reassurance that Market Street area was the most clean and safe area in the city. Other environmental cues contributed to this perception. The streetscape project completed in 2004 gave Market Street a uniform appearance. Brick sidewalks with granite curbs felt established and upscale, a far cry from the uneven pavement stained with chewing gum and trash found elsewhere in the city.

The physical appearance of buildings along Market Street also contributes to people's perception of their environment. A rehabilitated building or entire block appears to be as good as new, with vibrant paint colors, doors and windows that work, and attractive signage—all features that stand out next to older facades with peeling paint, spalling bricks, and grimy glass. The buildings on Market Street in the worst physical shape are found directly in the center of the Market Street commercial corridor along the east side of the 400 block. In an interview with Wilmington City Councilman Steve Martelli, he shares a friend's perception of the area after a night out to dinner:

So they went to Orilla's at the 400 block of Market. And so they walked out of Orilla's at 10 o'clock at night and they're on the 400 block and it's like desolate, almost like a nuclear holocaust you know. You walk out there there's buildings that are ripped in half, half rubble, and it's dark and, they're like what's the sense of me coming down, people want to be where people are. They want vibrancy. If there's no vibrancy there's nothing to bring them. But the draws that drives the vibrancy is the feeling of safety and security. If people don't feel safe they're not going to go there, it's as simple as that.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Steve Martelli, interviewed by the author, University of Delaware Center for Historic Architecture and Design Archives, August 9, 2010.

Despite all of the attempts made to visually signify safety, a negative perception of downtown still persists in the regional population, and individuals are still afraid to come to Market Street.

THE MANIPULATION OF MEMORY

In related effort to overcome negative public perceptions of downtown, the City of Wilmington, developers, and local institutions have focused on evoking positive memories of Market Street. Between September 8, 2007 and January 12, 2008, the Historical Society of Delaware hosted an exhibit entitled “Full Circle: A History of Change on Market Street.”¹⁶⁰ The exhibit identified Market Street as the “heart of Wilmington,” which “holds memories of our lives and aspirations.” Information was presented on eight text panels: “Full Circle? A history of Change on Market Street,” “Beginnings Along Market Street,” “Market Street in the Early 20th Century,” “Transportation and Public Works,” “Commerce and Shopping,” “Civic Expression and Cultural Activity,” and “Post War Challenges and Urban Renewal.” Tracing the commercial and social history of Market Street through historic photographs combined with these informational panels, the exhibit ultimately raises the question, “Where do we go from here?” This open-ended question was raised to a public audience, and aimed at raising public awareness of the physical changes occurring along Market Street.

¹⁶⁰ “Full Circle? A History of Change on Market Street.” Accessed December 4, 2010, http://www.dehistory.org/MuseumExhibits/FullCircle_07/DHM_FullCircle_2007.htm.

In response to the exhibit, Wilmington's *News Journal* published a series of editorials focusing on individual memories of Market Street. In sharing personal recollections, respondents to the *News Journal* paint a picture of the Market Street they once knew, revealing vastly different perspectives on the history of Market Street. Below, two responses are listed in their entirety. The first response is from Chris Miller, a female white Wilmington resident who grew up during the 1960s. Chris Miller describes Market Street during the 1960s as "The Weekend Hangout:"

Market Street was an every-Friday-night event for those of us growing up in the Wilmington area in the '60s. Downtown had everything we needed.

Dinner out on Friday night was always a treat at the New York Restaurant, the Splendid Restaurant, or the Chinese restaurant on Shipley Street, which I believe was called Wing Wang.

Eating at one of the candy shops, either Govatos or Reynolds, was a treat, too, since you got to take some candy home for a late-night treat. Of course, the counter service at the Federal Bakery or at Grant's was a fine meal for a Friday night, too.

Market Street was the place to do your banking, and in the '60s, when the Delaware Trust had a drive up window that allowed you to see yourself on the monitor; it was a true delight. The inside of that bank was beautiful. With its rich wood and marble trim, it looked like a museum. The interior appearance of the bank was breathtakingly and truly a symbol of wealth and power. Banks today have nothing in appearance compared with the space and décor of that bank.

The hustle and bustle and large crowds was what made Friday night on Market Street a weekly event. It was a must each week to shop at the "finer stores" – Kennards, Braunstein's, Arthur's, Adams and, of course, Mullin's, to mention a few. Every store had a second floor and a grand stairway to get to it. It was a thrill climbing the stairs to the departments upstairs. Mullin's had an elevator, and riding the elevator

with an elevator conductor was a thrill all in its own. And yes, every party dress I owned was a Cinderella dress from the upper level of Braunstein's.

[...]

Market Street was never dark, nor was the street ever empty. If the night was cool, it was certain you would stop and stand under the lights of the old Delmarva Power and Light building. I can still see the Reddy Kilowatt display that adorned the window with all the new electric appliances inside. Before you left downtown, you may have ventured to Fourth Street for a fresh chicken, or King Street for produce, meats and fresh roasted peanuts. It was a must to look at the wedding cakes in the window at the Federal Bakery and the beautiful treats for the kids. Of course, you always took home a fresh loaf of baked bread and some decorated cookies. The fresh-baked cookies and the roasted peanuts were always the Friday-night snack after a trip in town.

Saturday was a trip to the Warner Theatre to see the matinee. It was always a Disney movie followed by a walk down Market Street and another stop at the Federal Bakery.

I also remember the riots and the National Guard patrolling the city in the late '60s. That's when we stopped going in town. Five or six years passed before I returned to town. By then, I was a teenager marching with my school band in the Christmas Parade. It wasn't the same. Actually, it was sad. By that time, Market Street was not what I remembered as a child.

Sadly, for many years, you really didn't share your stories of going in town. People who didn't know about town before the changeover in the late '60s had a negative opinion of the city. You kept your comments about your connection to town to yourself.

It has probably only been during the last 15 years or so that I have heard people publically share their experiences of living in the city and shopping in town. I think people have gotten past the negative image that the city has had for so many years and now, as Wilmington engages in its revitalizing projects, hopefully the way life used to be in town

may become a lifestyle again for the next generation. Only time will tell.¹⁶¹

Chris Miller's recollections reveal fond memories of a Market Street that no longer exists. The vitality of the street during the 1960s is apparent, a thriving business district with a variety of restaurants and retail establishments, a street that "was never dark." Miller also identifies the race riots and National Guard patrols as the reason her family stopped going downtown. Interestingly, she even felt compelled to keep positive memories of Market Street private when confronted with Wilmington's negative image during the late twentieth century.

The second excerpt was written by Harmon R. Carey in response to the "Full Circle" exhibit as well *the News Journal's* published editorials. Carey is a prominent member of Wilmington's African American community and director of the Afro-American Historical Society of Delaware.

Market Street, as depicted in *The News Journal's* Crossroads cover story last month, may have been a "street of dreams and hopes" to white Wilmingtonians, but when I grew up here in the late 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, it was a street which epitomized the injustices of segregation – a pervasive fact of life for thousands of Black citizens.

Unfortunately, neither the current exhibit by the Historical Society of Delaware nor *The New Journal* story takes into account the views of Market Street held by African Americans.

This is a critical omission, not one necessarily of intentional racism, but the harm is the same.

¹⁶¹ "Market Street: Back in the Day," *The News Journal*, October 11, 2007, accessed December 4, 2010, <http://proquest.umi>.

According to the reporter, the Historical Society of Delaware staff “wanted voices other than those of city government and developers” which is commendable.

Are not our views valid in an exhibit which purports to present a history of change on Market Street?

Indeed, I would venture to say that the most significant changes on Market Street were not the exhibit’s physical depictions included in the news story, but the social changes in how Black people were treated on Wilmington’s main street.

Let us not forget that Woolworth’s at 5th and Market Streets – a favorite eatery for whites, which would not allow blacks to sit at their counter. Or that movie theaters such as the Rialto, Queen, Towne and Grande would not allow blacks to enter -- not even to sit in their balconies, which was permissible in the deep South.

Let us not forget that the leading theatre – DuPont’s Playhouse – once allowed black patrons in the third-floor balcony. Access was obtained by climbing the fire escape – a hazardous undertaking – and not the interior stairs.

Let us not forget the department stores which sold fashionable dresses to black women, but only allow them to try the dresses on – if at all – if they put on a chemise so their skins would not come in contact with dresses white women might later try on.

Let us not forget that most Market Street stores where whites worked as managers, salespersons, cashiers, etc. would not hire blacks at all. Those that did would only hire them (us) as stock boys, janitors and elevator operators. And, it is generally known in the black community that you could only be hired as an elevator operator if you were “fair” or light skinned.

Let us not forget that white policemen who helped the blind and elderly cross the street were the same policemen who with one kick from their black high top boots would destroy our shoeshine boxes and run us away from the comfort station alongside the Queen Theater.

Yes, Market Street was a street of hopes and dreams, but ours were much different.

We long dreamed of lunching at Woolworth's, of having a banana split at Govatos or enjoying a meal at the English Grille, of seeing the latest motion picture at the Lowes Aldine, of getting a summer job at Robert Hall Clothier, or a permanent position at Delaware Trust Company, of being treated courteously at Crosby and Hill's Department store, of learning a trade at Brown Vocational School or spending a night at the Hotel DuPont.

But these dreams paled in comparison to the dreams of freedom by our ancestors who were jailed at Market Street's Town Hall because they were runaway slaves.

Market Street has many stories, but those of African Americans have not been told and will continue to be omitted until we establish the African American Heritage Center slated for development at the old Allied Kid Building on 11th street and Clifford Brown Walk.¹⁶²

Harmon Carey's recollections of Market Street reveal a wholly different environment.

Carey's memories are a conscious rebuttal to what he perceived as a biased history presented by the News Journal articles and the "Full Circle" exhibit. In this sense, Carey was correct in criticizing the "Full Circle" exhibit. The text panel entitled "Civic Expression & Cultural Activity" discusses Market Street as a site for military parades, and political rallies, including marches for the women's suffrage movement, but it does not mention the fact that Market Street was a segregated environment. "Post War Challenges & Urban Renewal" quotes Mayor Jim Baker discussing the impact of the race riots, "which scared people half to death," but again, skirts any discussion of the issue of race or segregation.

¹⁶² Harmon R. Carey, "Wilmington's Market Street through a different prism," *The News Journal*, October 22, 2007, accessed December 4, 2010, <http://proquest.umi>.

Other documents that discuss the history of Wilmington also skirt the history of race relations in the city. In the section on the twentieth century history of Market Street in the City of Wilmington's Market Street Historic District Guidelines, there is a notable omission of both the race riots and National Guard occupation. The public has not forgotten these incidents although they have not entered into the politically acceptable version of Wilmington's history. As a younger generation comes of age, negative memories of Wilmington may become less significant factors in the revitalization process:

Robert Buccini: Well, it's funny, I worked with a colleague of mine, Tom Haddigan [?], who was one of the first people in our company, we're nearly 2,000 employees now and Tom Haddigan, one of the first people to work with us. He...when we bought the Delaware Trust building--and we since converted it to residential--you know I think he looked at it like, you know, 'what are you thinking.' And he actually, Tom actually worked...was a National Guardsperson and stood in front of the Delaware Trust, former Delaware Trust Building, with a gun, you know an automatic machine gun or something like that and actually was there. And so his memory of that building, most vivid memory, is actually sitting in front of the building, you know, with a gun and having some of the people he knew—African-Americans—saying, coming up and saying, you know, 'What's going on?' I think as generations change it becomes less remembered and I think anyone in my generation, I think, we don't give that another thought.¹⁶³

The memories of the late 60s are fading with time, but the residual impact of the race riots and occupation are evident in Wilmington today. Instead of allowing memories to disappear, keeping them alive can also be a valuable tool for revitalization.

¹⁶³ Robert and Christopher Buccini, interviewed by Jenifer Grindle Dolde, Market Street Oral History Project, Historical Society of Delaware Archives, June 26, 2007.

Carey's memories, which he presents as representative of the entire black population in Wilmington, reflect a street that was home to highly segregated institutions and shops. By clinging onto the memories of outdated practices, Carey's perspective may be interpreted as having a negative impact on the future of Market Street. Although Carey highlights the differences between the African American community and the rest of the population in Wilmington, Carey's honesty about the history of Market Street could be used to prevent history on Market Street from repeating itself.

Harmon Carey's memories of Market Street are as valid and valuable as Chris Miller's. These two responses represent the broad range in perception of both the history and future of the Market Street area. While some people wax nostalgic about the way things were on Market Street, those same places and activities are also a source of painful memories. These vast differences in opinion have a lot to do with the fact that Market Street was a segregated environment. However, just because certain aspects of history are painful or provocative does not mean they should be wiped from the public consciousness. By ignoring Wilmington's segregated history, developers and the government continue to discredit the role the black community played in Wilmington's development. An effort to present the public with an unbiased look at the history and current state of Wilmington's race relations could go a long way in creating a public environment that is open to all members of Wilmington's population.

THE USE OF SIGNAGE

Another major component of city and developer led efforts at revitalization involves marketing areas of Market Street through the use of signage and slogans. Often, this marketing phenomenon is referred to as “rebranding.” In our consumer culture, branding a commodity entails associating “functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements,” with the product so that it stands out in the public consciousness.¹⁶⁴ If the urban space is regarded as a product that offers individuals both services and amenities, then giving that physical space a brand is useful in differentiating it from other spaces and allows for the promotion of that area.¹⁶⁵ According to Bennett and Savani’s analysis of the literature,

This set of associations creates a “brand image” for the entity in question, i.e., a bundle of ideas, feelings and attitudes that people have about the brand that sum up what it connotes or means in the eyes of the public. The astute branding of a locality will highlight to outsiders its meaning in terms of its ‘core benefits, style and culture’ and (critically) will assist potential stakeholders (such as investors, residents or tourists) to identify the sources of place products relevant to their needs. Thus, the branding of an area can give it a substantial competitive edge.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Roger Bennett and Sharmila Savani, “The Rebranding of City Places: An International Comparative Investigation,” *International Public Management Review*, (2003): accessed January 2, 2011, <http://www.ipmr.net>, 70.

¹⁶⁵ Bennett and Savani, “The Rebranding,” 70.

¹⁶⁶ Bennett and Savani, “The Rebranding,” 70.

These new associations can also overshadow earlier, negative connotations the public may have with a certain area, while capitalizing on other more positive memories.

Along Market Street, various rebranding campaigns are evidenced in specific developer led projects as well as entire districts.

In 2004, Streuver Bros., Eccles and Rouse utilized extensive rebranding in order to market the full block rehabilitation project located along the 200 block of Market Street. SBER chose a name that drew attention to the early history of the area when they branded the block “Ships Tavern Mews,” after a tavern that George Washington, Lafayette, Aaron Burr, and Commodore Perry all visited through the late eighteenth century. According to the 1980 National Register Nomination for Lower Market Street, the “Sign of the Ship” Tavern stood at what is now 230 North Market Street.¹⁶⁷ This carefully chosen name led the public to disassociate the 200 block from the negative aspects of its history, including the National Guard occupation in 1968, and general perception of the block as the most unsafe and deteriorated portion of Market Street. Unfortunately, the commercial spaces that were a part of the heavily anticipated Ships Tavern Mews project did not achieve full occupancy, and “Ships Tavern” became more associated with a half-successful revitalization project than a thriving new downtown district.

¹⁶⁷ “Lower Market Street Historic District Nomination Form,” National Register of Historic Places. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Received January 29, 1980, entered May 15, 1980. Accessed January 2, 2011, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/research/>.



Figure 4.1 Ships Tavern Mews signage (*photograph by author, taken February 8, 2011*)

Many of the businesses that make their home in the Ships Tavern district are “creative” businesses, including the offices of Preservation Initiatives and the Archer Group, “an interactive marketing agency.” In 2007, Market Street from the 200 block through the 400 block was rebranded as LOMA, for the Lower Market district. The new name was intended to represent a creative design district that would become a magnet for the “creative class,”¹⁶⁸ while attracting commerce, culture, and a

¹⁶⁸ In “Cities and the Creative Class,” Richard Florida develops his “creative capital” theory. Florida argues that a community of creative individuals, defined as professionals employed in knowledge-based occupations, is crucial to the growth and health of the city. Urban areas with “technology, talent, and tolerance” make areas more attractive to the creative class, whose presence will stimulate further economic growth and urban development.

community comfortable with self-expression.¹⁶⁹ The concept for LOMA was developed by a committee featuring most of the players in the redevelopment of Market Street. Committee members included development firms SBER, Buccini/Pollin Group, and Preservation Initiatives, as well as non-profits including Wilmington Main Street and Wilmington Renaissance Corporation. Other members included the Commonwealth Group and GVA Smith Mack, two local real estate firms, and the City of Wilmington Office of Economic Development. The Delaware College of Art & Design and the Archer Group were also represented.

Signage was a crucial component of increasing awareness of the LOMA District to locals while marketing it as a location to potential businesses. The Archer Group developed an online presence for LOMA, as well as dramatic red and black signs with white text featured on street posts along lower Market Street. The signs boldly stated a variety of slogans, including, “GOOD DESIGN IS SERIOUS BUSINESS,” “CAUTION: CREATIVES AT WORK,” and “IT’S NOT WHAT YOU LOOK AT THAT MATTERS, IT’S WHAT YOU SEE,” a Henry David Thoreau quote. Since the early signage efforts to rebrand the LOMA District, the neighborhood has been successful at attracting new members of the creative class to the lower Market Street area.

¹⁶⁹ “LOMA Design District,” accessed January 2, 2011, <http://www.lomadesigndistrict.org/>.



Figure 4.2 LOMA signage (*photograph by author, taken February 8, 2011*)

THE WILMINGTON DRY PROJECT

Despite all of the efforts at rebranding Market Street through the use of signage, the local media, rehabilitation projects, and streetscaping, one block of Market Street continues to interfere with the revitalization of the entire street. The 400 block was once home to Wilmington’s landmark discount store—Wilmington Dry Goods. Today the block stands vacant and rapidly deteriorating, both a visual and functional intrusion to the rest of the Market Street corridor. Although the block has been targeted for redevelopment by the city and a local developer called Commonwealth, and later the redeveloper Preservation Initiatives, financial problems have prevented the rehabilitation of the block thus far.

Wilmington Dry Goods was located at 414-420 Market Street from 1924 through 1979, and by many accounts, is still Wilmington's most remembered store.¹⁷⁰ Owner Joseph M. Lazarus sold his goods marked up only 20 percent, making his prices the cheapest on Market Street. As neighboring businesses closed, Lazarus bought them, until he owned most of the 400 block. When the *News Journal* requested memories of Market Street from Wilmington residents, many of the responses included references to what was fondly called "The Dry." In Chris Miller's recollection of stores along Market Street, the only shopping experience she elaborated on was at "the Dry:"

After you did your clothes shopping, you had to stop at Wilmington Dry Goods: The bargains and treasures were unbelievable.

WDG had the dollar store mentality long before the establishment of the dollar store as we know it today. The large wooden tables in the back of the store (in front of the shoemaker) were a stop for every kid. Junk and jewels, but definitely a child's delight. It was fun rooting through the tables of clothes looking for that not-so-irregular irregular. At the beginning of every school year, girls and mothers flocked to the first day of the annual Dollar Day Sale to get their new fall dresses.¹⁷¹

Another respondent, Mary Clark Keyser, focused exclusively on "the Dry" in her reflection on Market Street:

I frequented the Wilmington Dry Goods at least once a week and wouldn't think of missing a sale. J.M. Lazarus had purchased the store when it was called Topkis Brothers and wanted to continue using the

¹⁷⁰ Rendle, *Ghosts of Market Street*, 39.

¹⁷¹ Chris Miller, "Market Street: Back in the Day," *The News Journal*, October 11, 2007, accessed December 4, 2010, <http://proquest.umi>.

name. The brothers refused to allow it, and he came up with the new name. We experienced shoppers were familiar enough to just call it “The Dry.”

[...]

Shopping at The Dry was a psychological experience, a study of survival in an aggressive world, an exposure of deep-seated greed and determination to win at all costs.

The women would gather three deep around a table stacked high with dry goods. They would grab a garment, yank it away from a less agile shopper, give it a quick once-over, then toss and grab another. Then they would notice out of the corner of an eye a piece of merchandise that was just the perfect thing, and obviously the only one on the table. But someone else had it. The buyers would wait with bated breath for the one holding the precious garment to examine it and then toss it into the heap. Three hands would suddenly reach out and grab the reject. Most likely it would be tossed again. But everyone went home happy with a prized possession.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Mary Clark Keyser, “Oh, those good old days,” *The News Journal*, September 27, 2007, accessed December 4, 2010, <http://proquest.umi>.

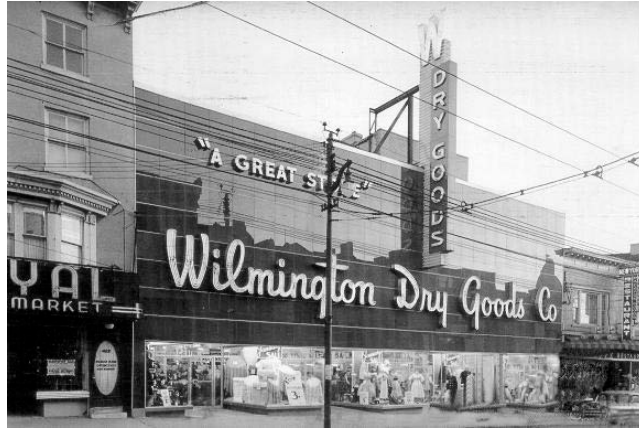


Figure 4.3 Wilmington Dry Goods in 1960 (*accessed February 9, 2011, http://www.oldwilmington.net/oldwilmington/photos_old.htm*)

Wilmington Dry Goods remained in business through the tumult of the 1960s riots and National Guard occupation, long after other landmark Wilmington stores had closed. When “the Dry” closed in 1974, relocating to multiple suburban shopping centers, it had an immediate effect on the number of shoppers along Market Street, as remembered by Barbara Benson, the then Director of the Historical Society of Delaware located on the five hundred block. “The kiss of death for [Market Street], when the foot traffic stopped coming on my block, the natural foot traffic that had been my noontime museum trade, was when the old Wilmington Dry Goods store went away.”¹⁷³

The buildings located at 414-420 Market Street were torn down soon after the store closed. By 2001, the entire block was owned by the city and Wilmington

¹⁷³ Barbara Benson and Carol Hoffecker, interviewed by the author, University of Delaware Center for Historic Architecture and Design Archives, August 8, 2010.

UDAG Corporation. That same year, Commonwealth Real Estate signed an agreement with the City of Wilmington to develop the 400 block of North Market Street with a high-rise complex fronting on King Street called the Renaissance Centre as well as rehabilitate the existing structure on Market Street.¹⁷⁴ The Renaissance Centre project evolved from a hotel and office in 2000, to a 225,000-square-foot office building and 650-space parking garage in 2001, down to a 140,000 square foot office building and garage half the size by 2004.¹⁷⁵

In November 2004, Renaissance Centre LLC reached an agreement with the city stipulating that new construction and the renovation of existing historic structures on the site be completed by the spring of 2007. In 2005, the developers approached Wilmington DRPC requesting permission to “dismantle the [historic] facades and rebuild them in their original form.”¹⁷⁶ That request was denied, and the city demanded that at least the facades of the structures be preserved. Renaissance Center LLC began working with Preservation Initiatives, a redeveloper specializing in rehabilitation in order to maintain the facades.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Maureen Milford, “Renaissance Centre on shaky ground,” *The News Journal*, September 1, 2004, accessed January 17, 2011, <http://proquest.umi>.

¹⁷⁵ Adam Taylor, “Developer adds new twist to Renaissance Centre; Amended plan calls for new hotel atop scaled-down project,” January 20, 2006, accessed January 17, 2011, <http://www.proquest.umi>.

¹⁷⁶ Maureen Milford, “Renaissance Centre project halted, for now; Concern about historic structure, ability to attract tenants cited,” September 30, 2005, accessed January 17, 2011, <http://www.proquest.umi>.

¹⁷⁷ Adam Taylor, “Developer adds new twist,” January 20, 2006

In 2006, Preservation Initiatives purchased the buildings fronting on Market Street from the Commonwealth Group, and drafted plans with HUE Architecture to adaptively reuse the Market Street buildings to create six commercial spaces and fourteen apartments.¹⁷⁸ However, during the construction of the Renaissance Centre project, the back portion of all of the buildings fronting on Market Street were cut off about sixteen feet from their front facades in order to make room for the new parking garage. The narrow depth of the spaces required a creative approach to the design of the project, which included plans to cantilever the upper floors over the parking garage. In order to raise public awareness and support for the plans, the \$13.6 million project was named “Wilmington Dry Goods,” a name chosen to evoke positive memories of past experiences at “the Dry.” PI utilized marketing and signage to promote the project, including renderings of the interior and exterior of the new spaces.

Preservation Initiatives decision to name the 400 block project “Wilmington Dry Goods” was a conscious effort to overcome negative impressions of the physical condition of the block with positive memories of shopping at the dry. Because Wilmington Dry Goods store was torn down, the architect contracted for the projects, HUE Architecture, had to design an infill piece to occupy the empty space where the Dry once stood. The proposed design for the infill piece is evocative of the original Dry Goods façade, featuring a shiny black cladding. The most obvious connection between the old Dry and Wilmington Dry Goods project is the “W DRY

¹⁷⁸ Adam Taylor, “City to invest \$6m in Market St. rehab,” *The News Journal*, April 12, 2010, accessed January 2, 2011, <http://proquest.umi>.

GOODS” sign, visible in the proposed perspective rendering of the project, which is virtually identical to the sign that once marked the location of Wilmington’s most well known store.



Figure 4.4 Existing state of the 400 block, (*photograph by author, taken October 17, 2010*)

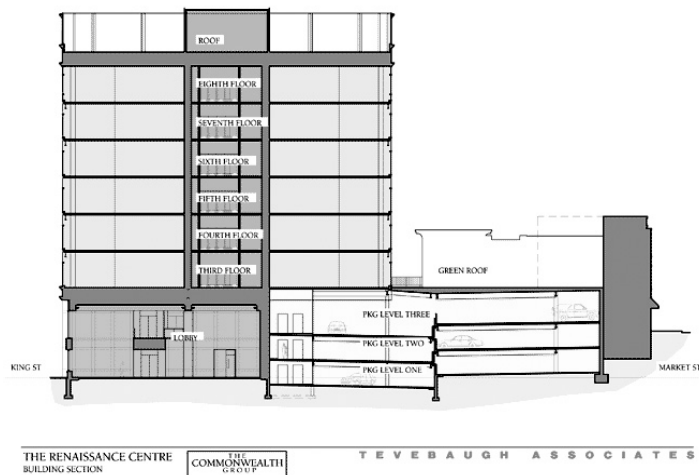


Figure 4.5 Section view of Renaissance Centre project showing Market Street properties on the right (*accessed February 2, 2011, www.405king.com*)



Figure 4.6 Proposed floor plans of the Wilmington Dry Goods Project (*produced by HUE Architecture for Preservation Initiatives*)



Figure 4.7 Proposed renderings of the Wilmington Dry Goods Project
(produced by HUE Architecture for Preservation Initiatives)

Although construction on the Renaissance Centre was completed in 2007, the Wilmington Dry Goods project failed to obtain sufficient financial backing to begin the project. In 2010, the city made a commitment to get the project moving by loaning Preservation Initiatives \$6 million from the “Market Street Upstairs Fund.”¹⁷⁹ According to William Montgomery, Wilmington Mayor Jim Baker’s chief of staff, the loan would likely turn into a grant before PI had to begin making payments, as the city was confident that the money made from construction permits and tax revenue from

¹⁷⁹ The Market Street Upstairs Fund was a \$15 million fund created by the City of Wilmington in 2009 in order to facilitate the renovation of upper floors of downtown properties by private developers. The remainder of the fund was awarded to the developers at the Queen Theater as well as Buccini-Pollin Group.

the project would result in more than \$6 million in time.¹⁸⁰ Despite the city's generous commitment to the rehabilitation of the Wilmington Dry Goods project, PI was unable to secure a \$3.1 million construction loan to finance the remainder of the project before the city's loan offer expired in August 2010. Currently, the fate of the 400 block remains uncertain. According to Mayor Baker,

There's only two things that are going to happen: one, we're going to have to tear the buildings down, or another bank will come along and do the other half of the financing, not half, but their financing, which matches what we put in, and then it will get done. But I would like to see it done before the Queen Theater comes back on line, so that whole area is a nice looking area for people to come into, but we don't know this point are we going to get another bank. The last time, the developer had to go all the way to the mid-West to get a bank to finance their project, they couldn't get any banks in the local area, so I can't really say. I hope they get it.

Leah Kacanda: Do you think that failure to get loans in this area reflects on Wilmington's banks opinions of Wilmington's ability to revitalize?

Mayor Baker: No, it's just banks across the country are not loaning money, and they're scared of their commercial loans. Banks, whatever the reason, made some bad commercial loans, now they're afraid they're going to come back to haunt them like the foreclosures on homes. So they're hoarding their money, waiting on if this other shoe drops. So hopefully they'll get confident at some point and start loaning money again.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Adam Taylor, "City to invest," April 12, 2010.

¹⁸¹ In a meeting with University of Delaware class UAPP828 Urban Society and Urban Policy and Wilmington Mayor Jim Baker on October 13, 2010.

If the banks fail to loan, the buildings will be torn down, leaving a giant hole in the middle of Market Street. The city and Preservation Initiatives commitment to the restoration of buildings in such poor condition affirms that rehabilitation is a priority, and considered crucial to revitalization. An entire vacant city block will interfere with pedestrian circulation and the success of other revitalization projects along the street. Despite all of the successful rehabilitation projects along Market Street, the failure of the Wilmington Dry project is a constant reminder of the area's decline that contributes to a public perception of danger and sense of hopelessness for the future.

CONCLUSION

In urban areas like Wilmington with a layered history and a socioeconomically segregated population, rehabilitation projects can become a symbol of the values and history of a privileged population or a symbol of hope for the future for the entire urban population. Today a visit to Market Street presents the viewer with a compelling juxtaposition. Beautifully preserved structures with vacant storefronts are fronted by brick sidewalks and granite curbs, while in the middle of Market Street, the east side of the 400 block is totally abandoned and rapidly decaying. The streetscape is peopled with minorities from surrounding neighborhoods and daytime business workers and executives, two groups who attempt to ignore each other. Gieryn discusses place as “at once, the buildings, streets, monuments, and open spaces assembled at a certain geographic spot and actors’ interpretations, representations, and identifications.”¹⁸² In its creation, the rehabilitated environment

¹⁸² Thomas F. Gieryn, “A Space for Place in Sociology,” *Annual Review of Sociology*,

visually represents the values of the city, developers, and privileged class, while the local population is subtly excluded.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Since receiving its city charter in 1739, Market Street has been the commercial and social heart of Wilmington, Delaware. Current revitalization efforts have attempted to recreate Market Street as a viable economic and cultural center. However, Wilmington's tumultuous civic history has played a role in both the decline of the downtown as well as the limited success of revitalization projects since the 1970s. Growing trends toward sustainable urban planning dictate that public spaces such as Market Street should promote social, economic, and environmental equity; however, the rehabilitation of historic structures requires a high level of expertise and a significant amount of capital. Recent efforts at revitalization subsidized by the local, state, and federal government has fostered an environment that promotes gentrification. While gentrification will contribute to economic growth along Market Street, recent commercial and residential development caters to higher income groups and is increasingly not accessible to lower socioeconomic groups.

Although the future of Market Street will be determined by the interactions between Wilmington's population and the built environment, revitalization is also influenced by cultural mores dictated by existing settlement patterns and historic events. Wilmington's evolving economy and growing transportation networks, and later planning and policy decisions influenced settlement

patterns throughout the city. During the mid to late-twentieth century, nationwide trends toward suburbanization contributed to white flight, and increasingly segregated housing patterns contributed to the physical, economic, and social decline of the urban environment. Events in Wilmington including the race riots and National Guard occupation still influence current public opinion on revitalization projects. A sociospatial approach to the revitalization of Market Street acknowledging the power of the landscapes of economy, transportation, race, and planning is crucial to developing an economically and socially sustainable built environment in Wilmington.

Although revitalization along Market Street could capitalize on local history to promote development accessible to the entire community, current policies promoting revitalization through rehabilitation encourage uneven development and socioeconomic segregation. Both government and private initiatives view private investment as the only way to revitalize downtown areas. Federal and state historic tax credit programs are crucial components to rehabilitation projects, without which Market Street would be left to deteriorate. The developers who are in a position to utilize these programs promote gentrification as a means to make rehabilitation projects financially viable. As Market Street goes through residential and commercial gentrification, the public environment offers less to lower socio-economic groups that live in the surrounding neighborhoods. By depending on gentrification to broaden Wilmington's economic base and make the downtown more attractive, public policies and private investment highlight social inequality, further segregating the urban environment.

Revitalization projects play a unique role in urban development as public projects that can represent the values of a privileged population or strive to create accessible places for the entire urban population. The personal recollections of diverse individuals such as Chris Miller and Harmon Carey reveal vastly different memories of the same places. The revitalization of areas that mean such different things to so many different individuals presents a unique challenge to the planners, preservationists, and city officials who play a role in shaping the future of Market Street. The built environment of Market Street today reveals the complex nature of revitalization. Vacant rehabilitated storefronts sit next to deteriorating buildings with healthy, commercial occupants. The pedestrian population is also diverse, composed of individuals from local neighborhoods, students, and professionals.

My most recent trip to Market Street was on Saturday February 12, 2011. Although the weather was unseasonably warm with temperatures in the forties, I was still surprised to see pedestrians on the street. The recently opened LOMA Coffee in the 200 block was crowded with customers. Stores along the length of Market Street were also open and busy with local patrons. Construction on the Queen Theater was clearly nearing completion, with signage advertising “World Café Live at the Queen.” Although many buildings still stood vacant, building improvement projects were active at several locations. Although I know the volatile history of revitalization along Market Street, I cannot help but be optimistic that this time, all of the efforts from the government, local nonprofits, developers, and individuals are paying off, and Market Street will return to prominence as a healthy and vibrant commercial and social corridor.

In the urban environment there is a collision of individuals and cultures, politics and policies, and building types and styles that result in a dynamic and complex environment. Theorists have argued and proven the significance and power of our historic urban environments, which have been harnessed for successful redevelopment in the past. With the move toward sustainable development, it is becoming more crucial for professionals to consider economic, environmental, and social variables in redevelopment projects. For downtown areas such as Market Street in Wilmington, Delaware, the principles of sustainable planning should compel planners to pay more attention to issues of social inequality. Plans should not promote segregation and displacement, but should value socioeconomic and cultural diversity. This thesis did not explicitly discuss steps planners and preservationists could utilize to mitigate the potential exclusionary public environment created by modern planning and preservation policy. However, the identity of different groups and individuals must be discerned and cultivated by professionals and the built environment they help to redevelop. Without this foresight, our new downtowns will continue to reinforce the socio-economic segregation that has continued to persist in our urban environments.

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