

Reading Deep Dive



2019 Annual Conference

**Pennsylvania Chapter of the
American Planning Association**

John Kramer and David Hunter



READING

Laid out 1748 by direction of Thomas Penn. Seat of Berks County since 1752. Incorporated borough, 1783. Soon became, and has remained, center of the Pennsylvania-Dutch area. An old and progressive industrial community.

THE FOUNDING, 1748

- **Original Inhabitants – Lenni Lenape Tribe (Delaware Nation)**
- **Thomas And Richard Penn Selected the Location – Mountains, River, Roads**
- **Founded – 1748; Named After Reading, Berkshire, England**

FOUNDING, CONTINUED

- Land Initially Divided Into Large Estates – 70 Degree Angle
- Original Plan – “Towne Of Reading” – 520 Lots, 204 Out-lots, 2 Principle Streets
- Grid Pattern Vs. 70 Degree Angles
- Main Streets – Penn And Callowhill – 80' Wide
 - 1 Block E&W On Penn From Intersection (Market Square) – 160'
 - At Intersection – 200' X 270'
- Other Streets – 60'; Alleys – 20'

FOUNDING, CONTINUED

- **To Create Appearance Of Prosperous Town, Centered On Market Place – Outside Main Area – Buildings Erected In 5 Years; Near Penn – 3; Penn Street – 2**
- **1748 - 1 House In Town Boundaries; 1751 – 100 Houses; 1752 – 200 Houses**
- **1752 - Berks County established; Reading becomes County Seat**

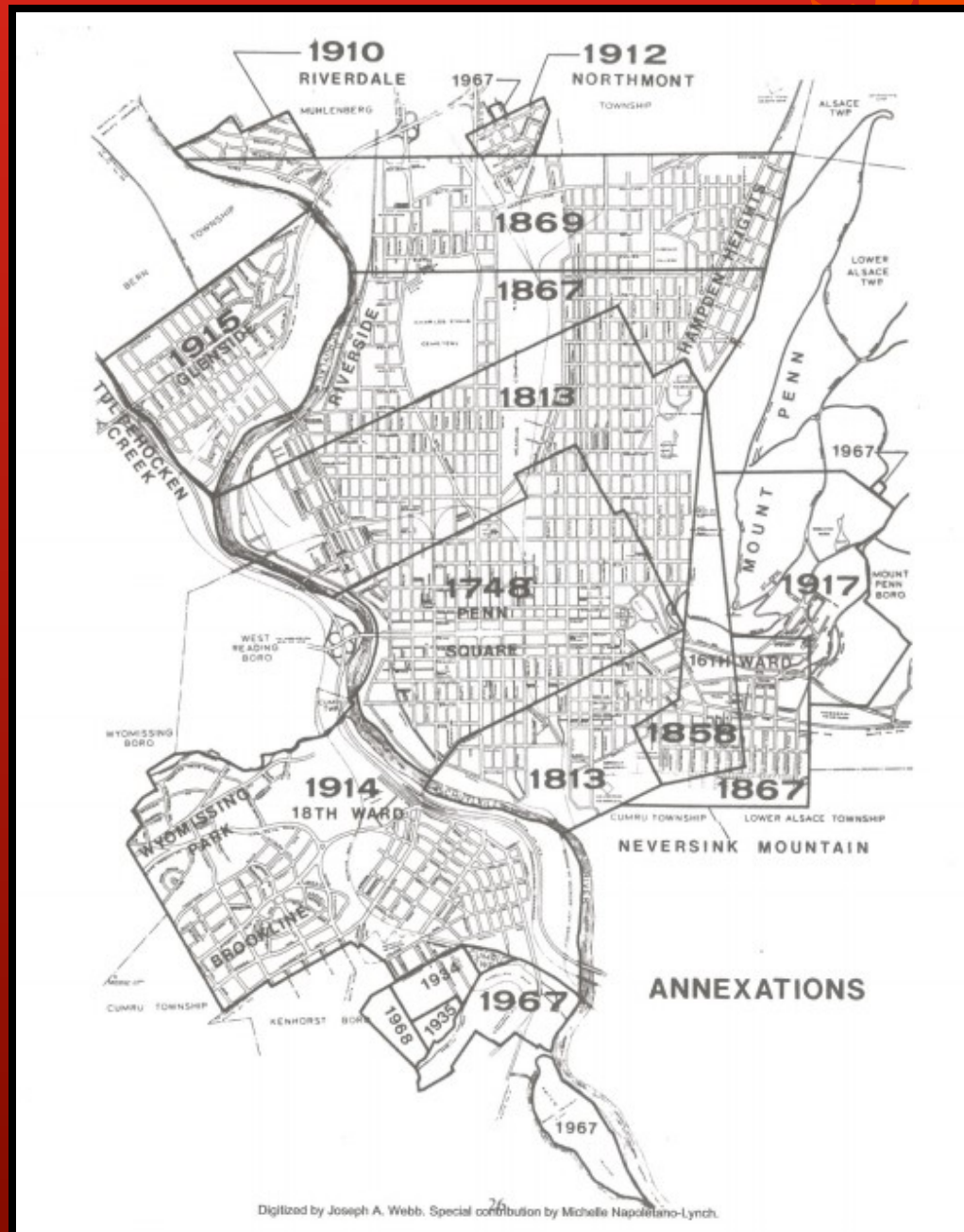
The background of the slide is a solid dark red color. It is decorated with various autumn leaves in shades of orange and red. These leaves are scattered around the edges of the slide, with a higher concentration on the left and right sides, framing the central text. The leaves include maple-like shapes and more rounded, lobed leaves.

Reading: THE EARLY YEARS

THE EARLY YEARS

- **During American Revolution – Area's Iron Industry Production > England's**
- **1783 – Change In Form Of Government - Chartered As A Borough By Pa General Assembly**
- **By 1800 – Log Houses Replaced By Stone And Brick Buildings**

Annexations



THE EARLY YEARS

- **First Settlers – Inn Keepers, Trading Posts, Tanners, Taverns**
- **1762 – Court House Erected On Square**
- **1 Tavern/40 Inhabitants**
- **1766 – Market Houses Established – Center Of Activity**
- **Transportation Outside Town – River, Ferries, Stage Coach**

Original County Courthouse 1762



Market Houses



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1ST HALF OF the 19TH
CENTURY

1800 - 1850

1ST HALF OF 19TH CENTURY (1800-1850)

- **1813 - Population Grows To About 3,500**
- **Granted A New Borough Charter – Legal Boundaries Beyond Original Plan**
- **Town Plan Altered – Provide For Streets North And South Of Original Plan**
- **1816 – First Penn Street Bridge (Wood); 1830 – Schuylkill Ave. Bridge; 1831 – Bingham Street Bridge**

1ST HALF OF 19TH CENTURY, CONTINUED

- **1825 – Schuylkill Canal Completed (Reading-Philadelphia-Delaware River)**
- **Canal Enlarged In 1832 And 1846**
- **1828 – Union Canal Connects Schuylkill River With Susquehanna Rivers**
- **1833 – Philadelphia And Reading Railroad Incorporated**
- **1837 – Rail Service To Pottstown; 1839 To Philadelphia; 1841 To Pottsville**

1ST HALF OF 19TH CENTURY, CONTINUED

- **1836-1847: Period Of Local Industrial Revolution**
- **Became Manufacturing Center – Intro Of Heavy Industry With Birth Of Steam Power**
- **Significant Residential Growth And Taller Buildings For Commercial Uses**
- **1846 – Original Market Houses Replaced By New Larger Market Houses In Penn Square**
- **By 1847 – Population Rose To 13,000**
- **March 16, 1847 - Incorporated As A City By Act Of State Legislature**



2ND HALF OF the 19TH
CENTURY

1851 - 1900

2ND HALF OF 19TH CENTURY (1851-1900)

- **Population Doubles In 20 Years – 15,743 In 1850 To 33,930 In 1870**
- **Many New Residents – European Immigrants – Employment And Problems Abroad**
- **Market Square – Fashionable Residence; Laborers Near Factories On Fringes; Wealthy Begin To Invest In Outlying Estates**
- **City Charter Amended 2 Times – 1861, 1864 – Changes Names And Number Of Wards**

2ND HALF OF 19TH CENTURY, CONTINUED

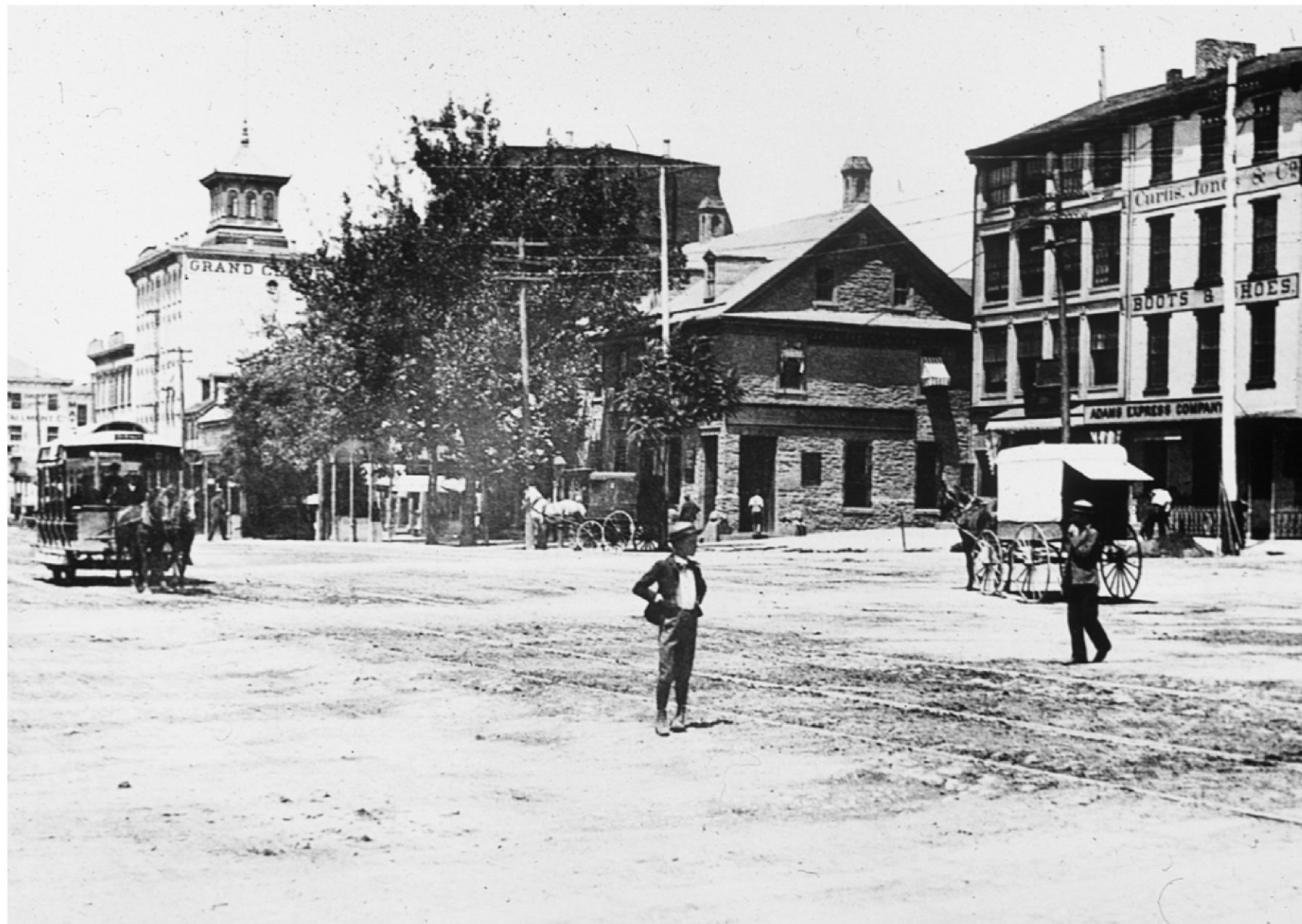
- **1850's – Railroad Expands Westward (To Harrisburg) And North (To Allentown) – Now Connected To Entire Nation**
- **RR Shops & Mills, New Industry, Laborer Housing - Fosters Growth In North**
- **City Boundaries Extended – 1858, 1867, 1869**
- **1868 – City Prepares Plan For Development Of Entire City – All Streets On Compass-point Grid System – Greatly Improved**

2ND HALF OF 19TH CENTURY, CONTINUED

- **By 1870 – Railroads Replace Canals**
- **As Railroad And Residential Development Extended Northward – Market Square Less The Geographical Center**
- **1871 – City Removes Dilapidated Market Houses From Square – Replaced With 4 Brick Markets (1 In Each Quarter Of City)**

2nd HALF OF 19TH CENTURY, CONTINUED

- **City Charter Amended – 1861, 1864 – Changes Names And Numbers Of Wards**
- **1874 - City Receives A New Charter – Becomes A City Of Third Class**
- **1874 – Start Of Horse-drawn Trolley Service To N&e (By 1893, All Electric)**
- **Provided Accessibility – Laborers And Work; Affluent To Move To Countryside (“Suburbs”)**



2ND HALF OF 19TH CENTURY, CONTINUED

- **1870 – 1910: Population Nearly Triples (33,930 To 96,000)**
- **Building Boom – No Land Added**
- **Due To Building Associations – More People Owned Homes Than Anywhere Else – Very Affordable**
- **Major Department Stores Established – Pomeroy's And Whitneys**



1ST PART OF the 20TH
CENTURY

1900 - 1930

1ST PART OF 20TH CENTURY (1900 – 1930)

- **1900 – 1930: Population Continued To Increase (79,000 – 111,000 Was Largest Ever)**
- **But By 1910 – Most Progress Occurring Outside City (Lower Land Prices, Fewer Development Restrictions, Trolley Svc.)**
- **City Continued Building Smaller Rowhouses – Feeling Of Congestion, Drabness, Loss Of Individuality**

1ST PART OF 20TH CENTURY, CONTINUED

- **Major Happening – Beginning Of General Use Of Automobile**
- **Reading Had Some Of Earliest Manufacturing Of Automobiles**
- **Result Of Growth – Noise, Pollution, Congestion, Unattractive Open Space**
- **1910: Civic Association Of Reading Engages John Nolen To Prepare A New City Plan**



PENN SQUARE, READING, AS IT IS TO-DAY—"A BARE, UNFURNISHED, UNATTRACTIVE OPEN SPACE, BLAZING HOT IN SUMMER, BLEAK AND COLD IN WINTER."

1ST PART OF 20TH CENTURY, The Nolen Analysis

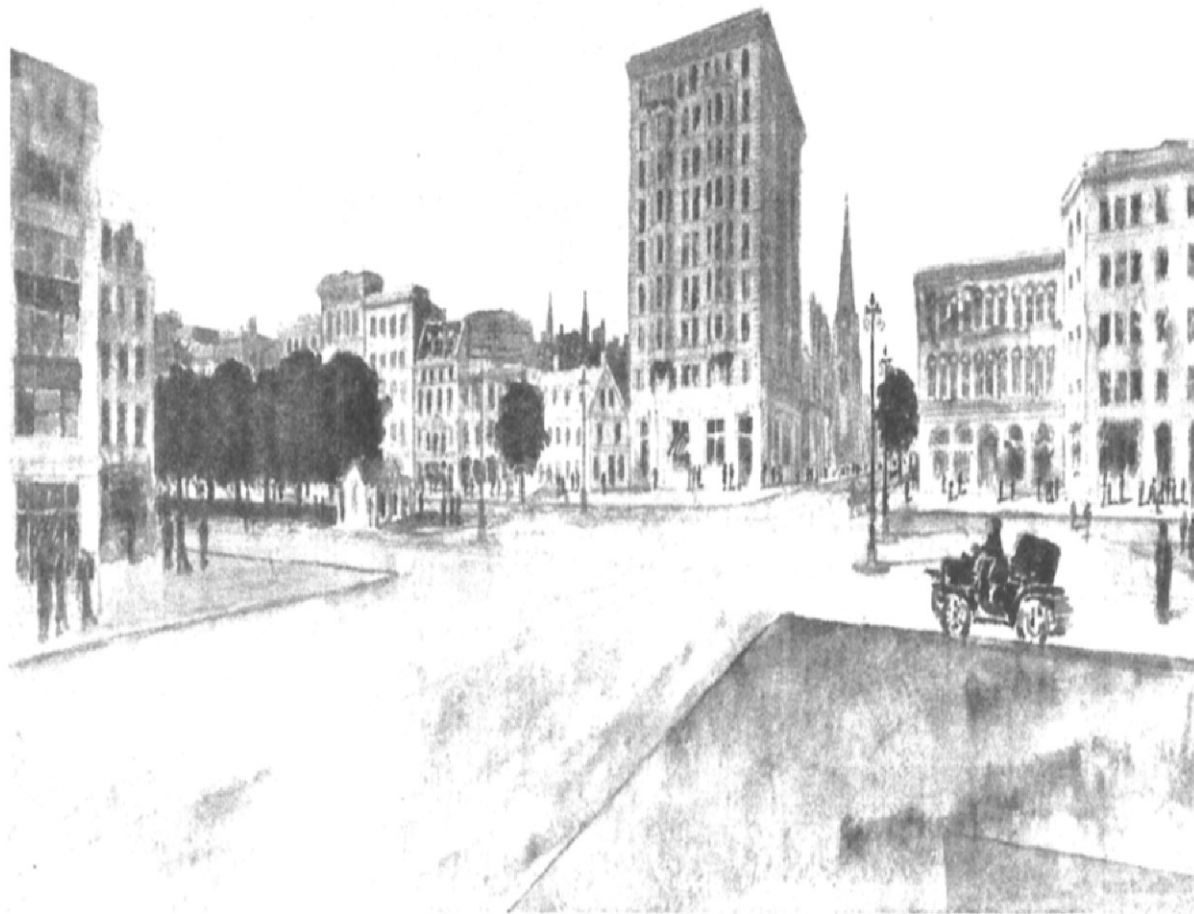
- **Main Factors Considered By Nolen –**
- **Monotonous Grid Street Plan**
- **Narrow Streets/Very Narrow Alleys**
- **Most Buildings Without Setback**
- **Different Land Uses Intertwined**
- **No Homogeneity Of Neighborhoods**
- **No “Zone System” (Like Germany)**

1ST PART OF 20TH CENTURY, Economic Factors

- Economic Factors Likely To Control Future Development Of Reading**
- Reading Is An Industrial City- Proximity To Coal/Unsurpassed Transportation**
- Depends Upon No One Industry- Furnaces, Steel Mills, Machine Shops, Wagon Works, Steel Frames For Autos, Hat Factories, Hosiery And Other Mills, Breweries, Tanneries, RR Shops,.....**

1ST PART OF 20TH CENTURY, Nolen Plan

- **John Nolen 1910 Planning Report: Main Things To Do --**
- **Adopt More Up-to-date Method Of Locating And Improving Streets**
- **Remove All Wires, Poles, Obstructions From Main Streets**
- **Take Vigorous Steps To Abate Smoke Nuisance**
- **Extend City Limits By Annexation**



INTERSECTION OF FIFTH AND PENN STREETS, READING, AS PROPOSED.

Nolen Report Recommendations

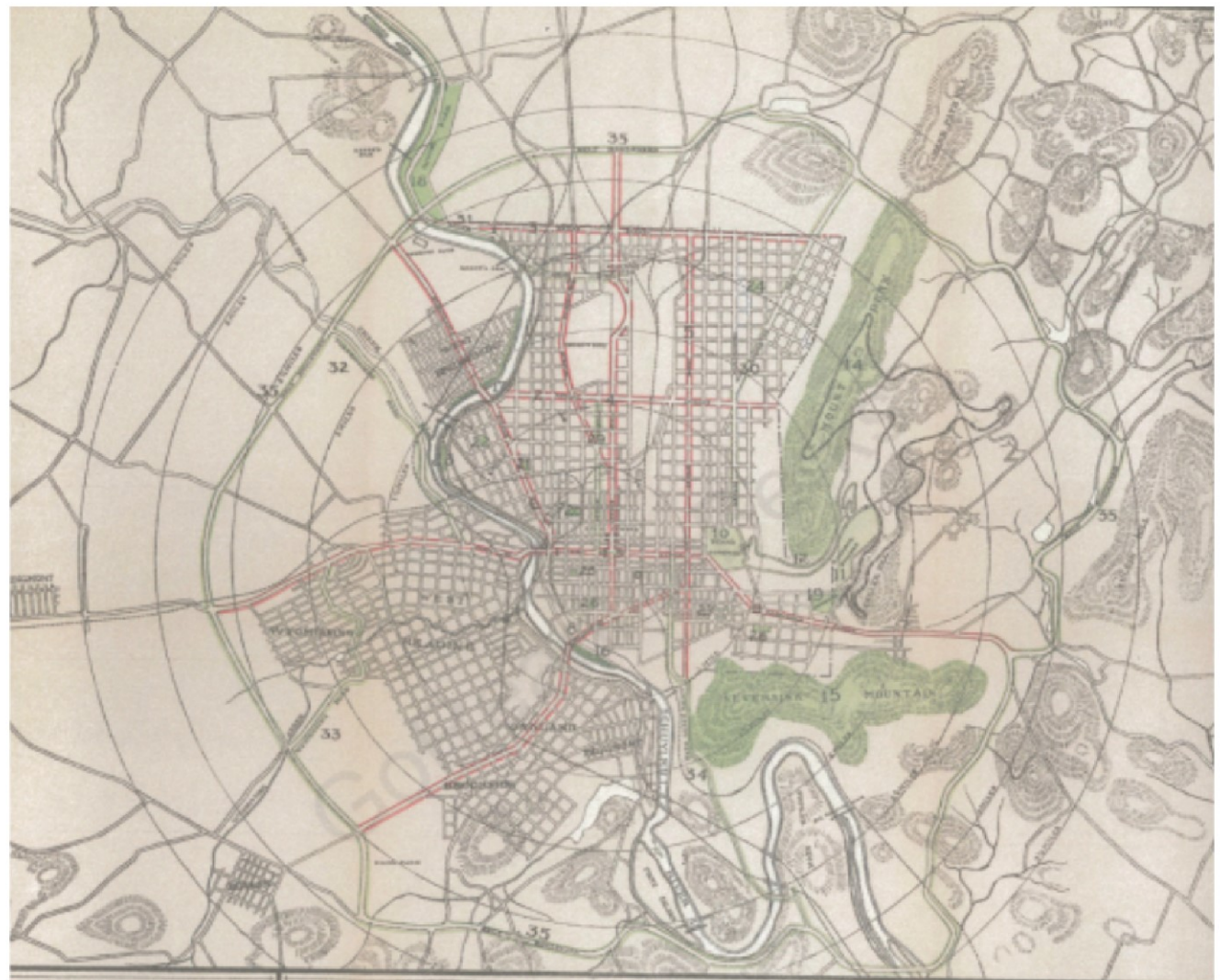
- **Construct Central Mall Or Narrow Park Strip On Penn Square**
- **Make Best Possible Grouping Of Public And Semi-public Buildings**
- **Layout System Of Thoroughfares And Blvds., Including Diagonal Avenues And Belt Blvd.**
- **Gradual Elimination - Grade Crossings**

Nolen Report Recommendations

- **Build A Better Type Of Bridge Across Schuylkill River**
- **Secure As Many Open Spaces As Possible For Playgrounds**
- **Better Use Of Natural Features For Public Parks**
- **Investigate Improvement Of Housing Conditions (Larger Semi-detached Homes On Curving Streets)**

Nolen Report Recommendations

- **1912 – New Penn Street Bridge (Stone); 1921 – New Bingaman St. Bridge**
- **Annex Portions Of Adjoining Townships
1910, 1912, 1914, 1915, 1917, 1934, 1935**
- **By 1930 – Had 700 Mfg Institutions Producing
>300 Different Kinds Of Goods**



■ TRAFFIC STREETS

- 1 POPE STREET
- 2 SPRING STREET
- 3 BROAD STREET
- 4 FIFTH STREET
- 5 TENTH STREET
- 6 MARKET STREET
- 7 CENTRAL AVENUE
- 8 BROADWAY STREET
- 9 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

■ EXISTING PARKS AND BOULEVARDS

- 10 PARK, COMMON
- 11 MINERAL SPRINGS
- 12 PARK BOULEVARD

■ PROPOSED PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS AND BOULEVARDS

- 13 PARK
- 14 PARK BOULEVARD
- 15 REYNOLDS PARK

GENERAL PLAN FOR THE FUTURE CITY OF READING PENNSYLVANIA

PREPARED FOR READING CIVIC ASSOCIATION BY

JOHN NOLES LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

1909

Digitized by GoReadingBerks.com

- 16 WILLIAM CRANE
- 17 SHAFER HILL
- 18 REVER PARK
- 19 PENNSYLVANIA

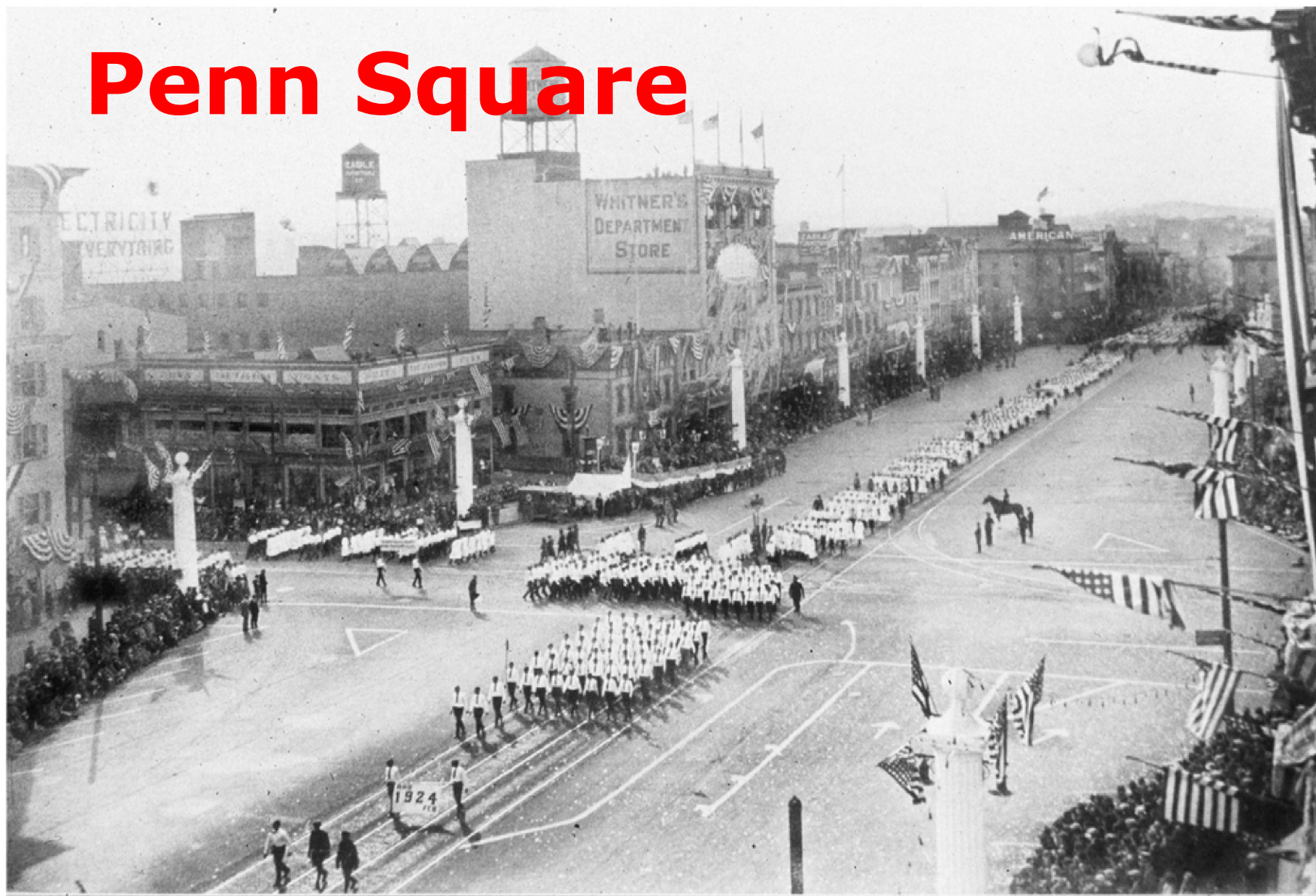
PLAYGROUNDS

- 20 LAKESIDE PARK
- 21 SCHUYLKILL AVENUE AND GREEN STREET
- 22 WALTON STREET AND MAIN AVENUE
- 23 ISLAND AT FOOT OF GLEN AVENUE
- 24 PENNSYLVANIA AND BROAD STREETS
- 25 BROAD AND FRANKLIN STREETS
- 26 TENTH AND SPRING STREETS
- 27 PENNSYLVANIA AND BROADWAY STREETS
- 28 FIFTEENTH AND COTTAGE STREETS


BOULEVARDS

- 29 FIFTH STREET
- 30 WALTON STREET
- 31 REVER PARK
- 32 WALTON STREET
- 33 WALTON STREET
- 34 WALTON STREET
- 35 WALTON STREET

Penn Square



BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1924
Their Marching and Formation Was Perfect

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THE DEPRESSION, WAR YEARS AND BEGINNING DECLINE

THE DEPRESSION, WAR YEARS, AND BEGINNING DECLINE

- **Economic Depression – 1930's – Severe Impact On Reading**
- **Heavy Industry – Most Severe Losses**
- **Reading Railroad Began To Decline**
- **But – Jobs In Railroad Industry – Less Affected Than Many Industries**

DEPRESSION, WAR YEARS, BEGINNING DECLINE, CONTINUED

Some Other Impacts Of Depression --

- Physical Conditions In City Deteriorate
- Birth Rate Dropped Substantially
- Very Few People Moved To City From Rural Areas
- European Immigrants Continue – No Jobs
- People With Means (Auto, Money) Begin Moving To Suburbs

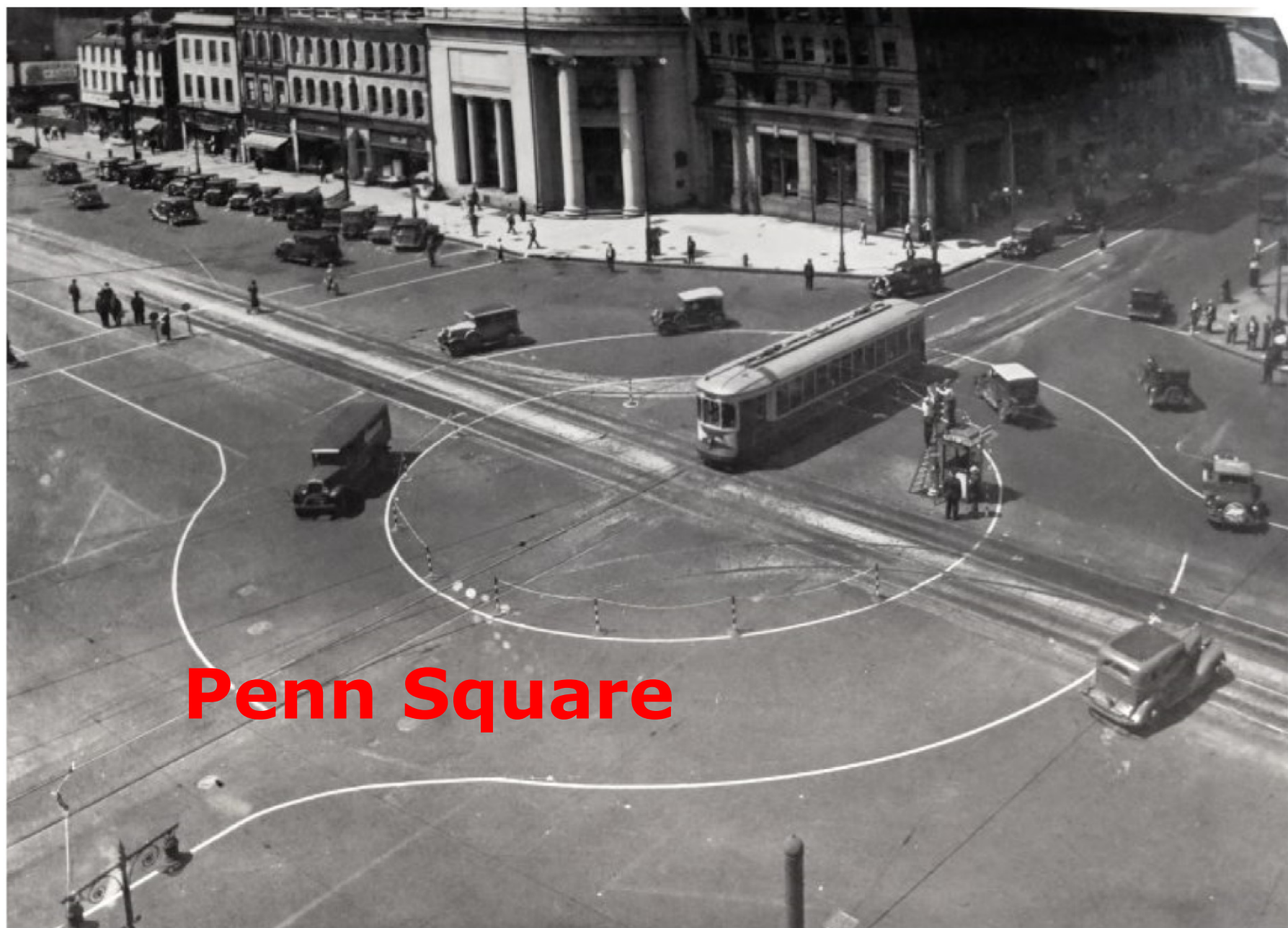
DEPRESSION, WAR YEARS, BEGINNING DECLINE CONTINUED

- **By 1940 – Exodus To Suburbs In Progress**
- **WWII – Restored Some Economic Stability – Reading Was Important Industrial Center**
- **Post WWII – Suburban Exodus Continues Due To – Federal Housing Policies, Highway Construction, Increase In Private Vehicle Ownership, Decline Of Railroads, Deteriorating Downtown Area, Increased Self-sufficiency Of Suburban Living**



Penn Street, 1941

- 
- **Late 1940's – Begin To See Increase In Number Of Hispanic Residents, Primarily From Puerto Rico (Farm Workers)**
 - **1950 – 1960: Reading Remains Major Retail Center In Berks County– Major Department And Specialty Stores, Movie Theaters, Restaurants, “Place To Be”**
 - **But – Suburbs Beginning To Build Strip Shopping Centers – And City Residents Continue To Move Out**



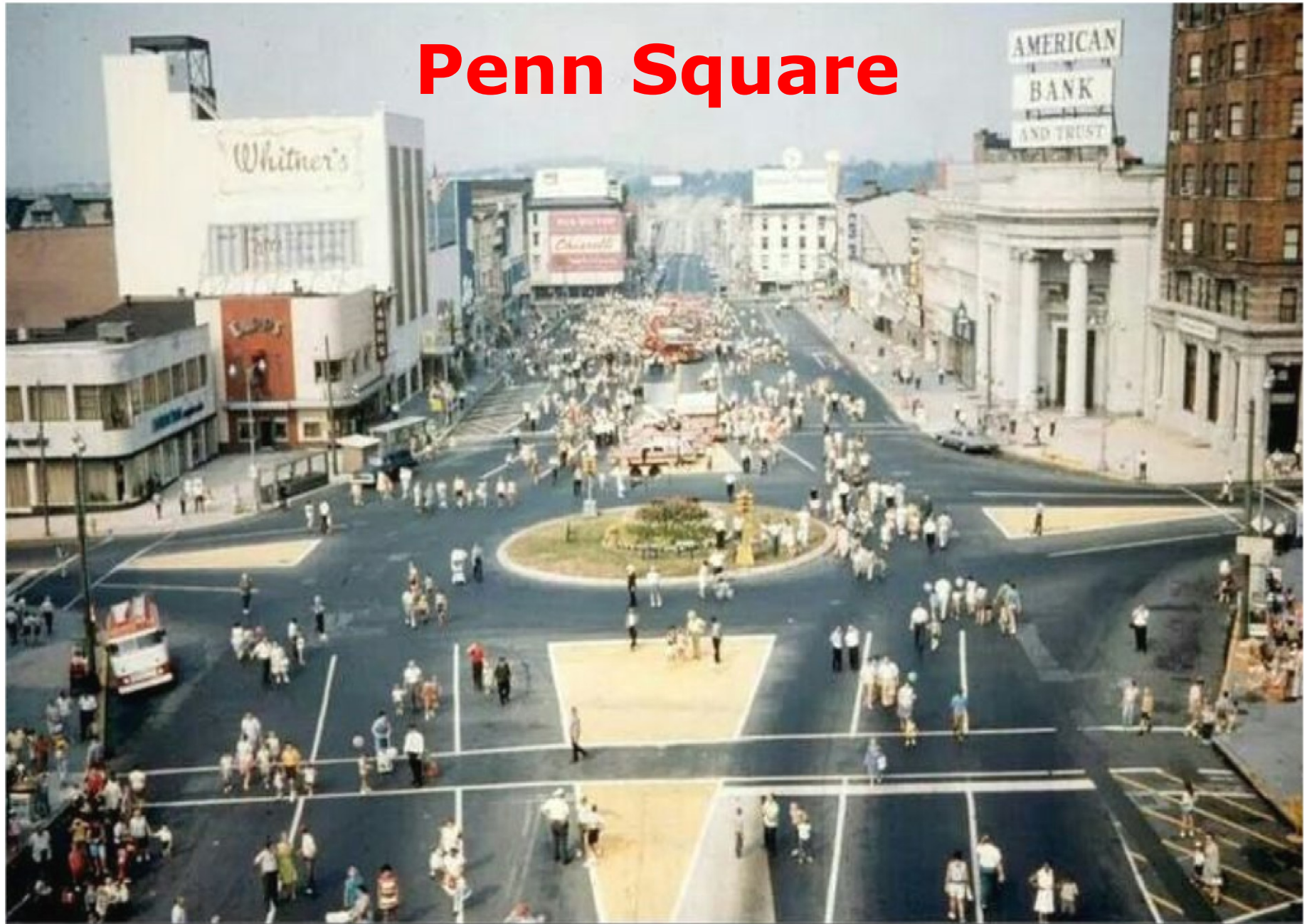
Penn Square



Recent Past

1960 - 2019

Penn Square



Downtown Reading – Penn Square

- If you hear someone refer to Penn Square, they are speaking of the 400 and 500 blocks of Penn Street with the center being 5th Street. It marks the center of downtown Reading.
- The center of Penn Square was a traffic circle, and traffic gave way to the trolleys that ran North/South on 5th Street and East/West on Penn Street before being replaced with a traffic circle.

Penn Square



The Decline of Downtown 1970's – 1980's

- **Berkshire Mall opened in 1970 with three anchor department stores. The mall is still operational and is now anchored only by Boscov's.**
- **Fairgrounds Square Mall opened in 1980 and is in decline. It is now only anchored by Boscov's.**

Urban Renewal

- “For years downtown development was at a standstill. With the exception of a few buildings, including Pomeroy’s Department Store, Harold’s Furniture, and the Astor Theatre, the 600 and 700 blocks of Penn Street was a two-block corridor consisting of empty lots, most of which were used as surface parking lots.
- The majority of the buildings that stood on these lots had been demolished in the late 1960s to make way for a downtown mall which never materialized.”
- <https://berksnostalgia.com/penn-square-history-downtown-reading/>



The Penn Square Project

- The downtown mall was never built but the city did go through with the part of the plan that involved turning the entire 500 block of Penn Street into an outdoor pedestrian area. It was completed in May of 1975 at a cost of \$1.6 million.”
- <https://berksnostalgia.com/penn-square-history-downtown-reading/>

Penn Square Pedestrian Plaza 1975



Penn Plaza Pedestrian Plaza

- “This was an effort to help businesses along Penn Street garner more foot traffic and increase profits as a result. Automotive traffic was cut off completely from this block and had to be re-routed around, which caused the inevitable traffic problems.
- The effort was too little too late, however, as established malls like the Berkshire had already started hammering nails into the coffin of downtown being a popular shopping destination. Perhaps it was inevitable.”
- <https://berksnostalgia.com/penn-square-history-downtown-reading/>

Penn Plaza Pedestrian Mall

1975 – 1993



Deconstruction of Penn Plaza

By 1990 the city decided that the Penn Square pedestrian Mall needed to be opened back up to traffic and again redeveloped the area, ripping out the pedestrian area. This was completed in 1993 and has remained this way since.

<https://berksnostalgia.com/penn-square-history-downtown-reading/>



1980's

- In the 80s, many buildings were developed in the 600 and 700 blocks of Penn Street to fill up the empty space left by the failed mall plans and also to attempt to bring businesses downtown. Penn Square Center was one of those buildings.
- <http://mg-architects.com/2017/03/15/revisiting-readings-architectural-past-penn-square-center/>

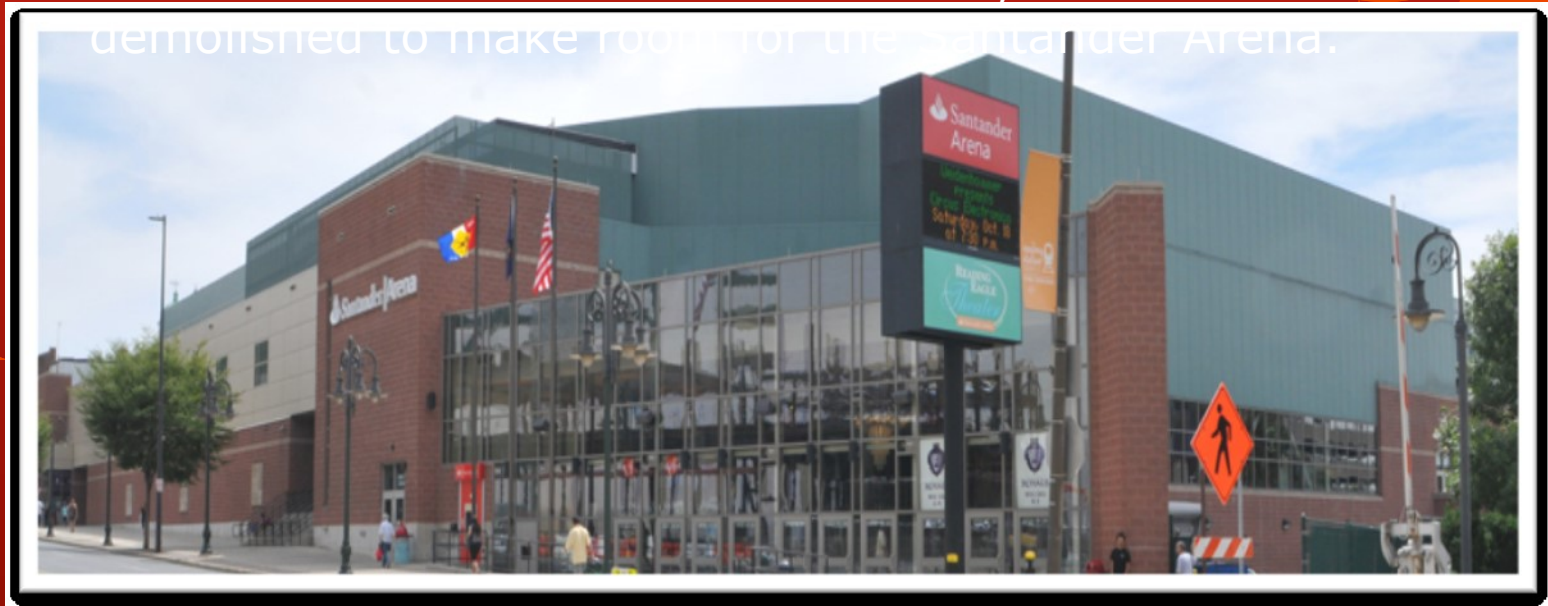


Located on the northeast corner of Penn and Sixth Streets, Penn Square Center was the first of several new office buildings to be built in center city Reading between 1977 and 1987



Santander Arena

- A 7,160-seat multi-purpose arena, built in 2001, the arena sits on the former site of the Astor Theatre; one of several grand movie and theater palaces built in the early 20th century. Closed in 1975, the theater sat vacant for over two decades. In 1998, the Astor was demolished to make room for the Santander Arena.



- Steps were taken to retain mementos of the Astor, including its ornate Art Deco chandelier and gates. These are on display and in use inside the arena, allowing insight into the ambience of the former movie house.

The DoubleTree Hotel

2015



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OUR FRANKLIN STATION PUB!

**Saucony
creek**
Craft Brewery + Pub

OPENING SOON!



APPLY WITHIN JUNE 18-22

9:00 AM-4:00 PM

7th and franklin street reading, pa

SE HABLA ESPANOL



Penn Square – Present Day



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Discussion:

**What Should the City
Do With
Penn Plaza?**