



**Historic Preservation in Philadelphia and Beyond**  
**Bey Amani (COL 2019)**  
**Advisor: Francesca Ammon**

Philadelphia is the fifth largest city in the country. It has played host to William Penn's landing, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and infrastructural transformations that set precedent in other parts of the nation. As the city continues to change, it is important to reflect on methods of Urban Renewal. This summer, I joined Dr. Francesca Russello Ammon in her research: "Historic Preservation in Philadelphia and Beyond".

The Washington Square East Urban Renewal Area, more commonly known as Society Hill, was an effort that saw its beginning in 1947, with the Better Philadelphia Exhibition. Building began in 1959 and continued into the 70s. As one of the many renewal projects conducted by the Commission for City Planning and the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, Washington Square East transformed from one of the city's slums into one of its most affluent areas within 20 years.

What differentiated the Washington Square East project from other endeavors in the same era was its basis in the historical preservation of the colonial Georgian and Federal styles of architecture from years past, as opposed to the classic 'raze everything and rebuild' approach. The project involved evaluation, condemnation, resale, and renovation of historic structures, and the construction of new town homes and three large towers. It was a constant conversation of how historical sentiment could be salvaged while remaining modern, functional, and attractive.

Along with insight into the planning process, we were able to see how neighborhoods reacted to policy change. Cross-referencing archived documents from collections all over the city allowed us to piece together stories on specific structures and households as well as processes for the implementation of the renewal policies and to infer pecking orders and biases in the renovation work-- amongst both the municipal and local organizations and home owners.

In the classroom, we read articles and learned statistics, but with this research I was able to explore how policy affects life. Through letters, blueprints, building permits, architectural surveys, and newspaper clippings, we were able to shine light on an area of over 700 homes that has completely

changed. In a world of searchable databases, I learned how to conduct archival research and read in between the lines of advertisements and policy. It has inspired me to search for ways of archiving contemporary changes in the city. I will take this experience with me as I further my studies, as it has challenged me to look for deeper stories and shown me places where I can find them.