

From Conni Bille':



Last year my classmates decided that, for our 55th reunion, they would like to visit the Constitution Center, which did not exist when we were undergraduates, to focus on the importance to us of the Constitution and its amendments, so critical during this time when democracy is being challenged.

I suggested that a tour of the historic district might deepen recognition of the profound role that Penn and Ben Franklin provided in the establishment of essential American ideals that inspired the writing of the Constitution. My committee was enthusiastic, and my project was launched.

At the Reunion, our class of 1968 was able to visit the Constitution Center, Independence Hall, and the Museum of the American Revolution, and shared a bus tour through Philadelphia's historic district.

The tour map and booklet were designed to be Penn-centric to inspire my 1968 classmates and the broader University community to remember the impact Penn and Franklin had on the creation of our country. Still, I feel sure that, over time, others more knowledgeable than I may want to amend it, just as America has amended our Constitution.

This tour, using the map, is really best done on foot, in any order according to one's interest, including visits to the accessible places. It could easily take a whole day. For those who do not have the time or opportunity to walk the half-mile-square area, I hope the booklet will serve as a pleasant armchair excursion.

In my research I encountered many historical puzzles — like the overlap of the location of Penn's first medical school, with the address of the Library Company. The original Surgeon's Hall of the medical school possibly held lectures in the building that housed the Library company, while it probably used the tiny building next door shown in the booklet illustration to cut up cadavers. The addresses at the site overlap during the same time period, though I did not go so far as to research the records at the Library Company (which is a reconstruction of the original building).

Over these past few months, I have slightly modified the original information — but I know there is more that can be done and facts to be added. I'm grateful to the Alumni Relations communications and design team for taking my map and the historic photos and crafting such a lovely keepsake booklet of which I am very proud. This map is my gift to Penn and 1968.

I'm not pretending to be an historian; I am an English major who gathered interesting stories about the past which reveal part of the University's relationship to the City of Philadelphia and to 274 years of American history. Right here, right now, we can observe how sites are sometimes preserved, sometimes leveled, sometimes rebuilt, and often forgotten.

My class of 1968 graduated Penn at the inflection point of the 20th Century, in a tumultuous year that impacted a generation. I wanted to acknowledge our generation's mission as we fought to extend those original American ideals of freedom and equality to include race and gender.

Ben Franklin, the University of Pennsylvania, and the City of Philadelphia were central to the development of America, to the uniting of the States, and to the establishment of one of the world's great centers of learning and scientific advancement. I hope that this map, created as part of 1968's 55th reunion, can inspire others to tour this vibrant historic district, the birthplace of Penn, and reflect on the ideals that created a university and a nation.

Click [here](#) to read the Historic Philadelphia Tour booklet created for Penn Alumni by Conni Bille' CW'68

Also hosted on the [Class of 1968 website](#).