

# SUBURBANIZATION AND THE SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY: RESIDENTIAL DECENTRALIZATION IN PHILADELPHIA, 1880-1900

BY MARGARET SAMMARTINO MARSH\*

ALTHOUGH SUBURBS have been a part of the American landscape almost since the development of cities themselves, until the mid-nineteenth century they would have seemed unfamiliar to any observer whose perception had been conditioned by the twentieth century concept of suburbia. Quite unlike the residential communities which we have come to view as typically suburban, they were areas of "mud and jimcrack cottages," shanty-towns, and nuisance industries. Their populations, wrote a *New York Tribune* reporter of an ante-bellum Philadelphia suburb, were "a set of the most graceless vagabonds and unmitigated ruffians."<sup>1</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, many of these "peripheral settlements," as Gregory Singleton refers to them, began to develop into modern suburban areas. This process of suburbanization has until recently caught the interest of few historians. Sam Bass Warner's *Streetcar Suburbs* is virtually the only monograph on the subject, although several articles have appeared during the last few years.<sup>2</sup> Because of the very recency of historical interest in suburbanization, scholarly perception of the process still seems to be heavily influenced

\* The author is Assistant Professor of Historical Studies at Stockton State College, Pomona, New Jersey.

1. Tello J. D'Apéry, *Overbrook Farms* (Philadelphia: Magee Press, 1936), p. 59. Stuart Blumin, "Residential Mobility in the Nineteenth Century City," in Allen Davis and Mark Haller, eds., *The Peoples of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), p. 44.

2. Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962); Gregory Singleton, "The Genesis of Suburbia: A Complex of Historical Trends," in Louis Masotti and Jeffrey Hadden, *The Urbanization of the Suburbs* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1973), pp. 29-44. Kenneth T. Jackson, "The Crabgrass Frontier," in Raymond H. Mohl and James F. Richardson, eds., *The Urban Experience* (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 1973).

by the other social sciences. While such a perspective is valuable, it also fosters a tendency to use the post-World War II suburbs as the definitional model. Thus, suburbs often are identified solely as satellite towns of a large metropolitan center which maintain their political independence. But autonomy is not a necessary precondition for suburbanization. In fact, the first manifestations of a mass suburban trend involved the development of residential communities in outlying areas of the city during the last third of the nineteenth century. Herbert Gans refers to such communities collectively as the "outer city," and contends that even today the physical and social structures of the outer city resemble those of the suburban town rather than the inner city.<sup>3</sup> One of the first serious students of suburban life, Harlan Douglass, had argued in 1925 that the political dependence or independence of an area was irrelevant to its classification as a suburb. Drawing on the insights of both Gans and Douglass, I would define the late nineteenth and early twentieth century suburb as a residential area of relatively low density, connected to center city by fast, convenient commuter transportation.<sup>4</sup>

Technological developments provided physical momentum for the outward thrust of population, but technology by itself did not produce mass suburbanization. Transportation advances, for example, were sometimes adopted by one city and ignored by another. Chicago acquired commuter railroads with low rates and convenient schedules as early as 1874, while Philadelphia waited until the 1890s for comparable service. Other forms of mass transit were also adopted with varying degrees of dispatch and enthusiasm by individual cities.<sup>5</sup>

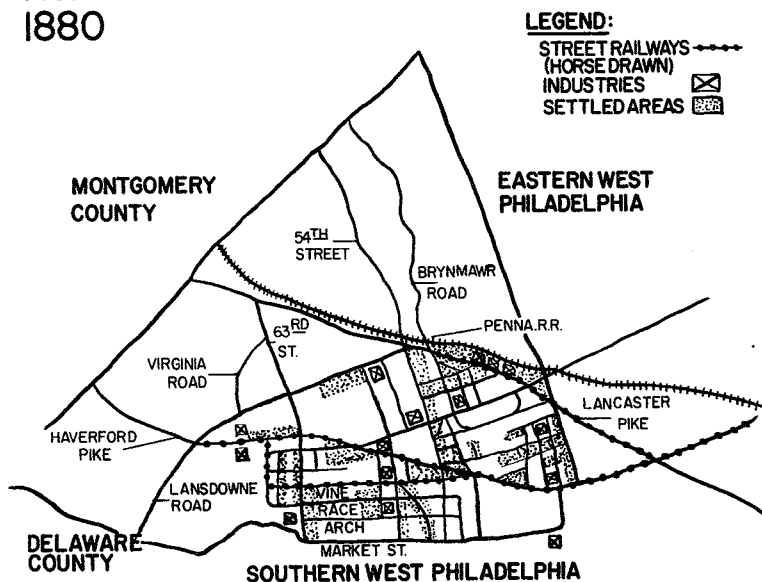
Technology offered the means for residential dispersion; massive immigration from southern and eastern Europe seems to have provided the motive. The influx of Europe's peasantry, who clustered together in ethnic enclaves in the inner city, both altered the population composition and increased urban congestion from the late nineteenth century onward. Such overcrowding, as well as the dismal living conditions that newcomers and native working-class families alike

3. Herbert Gans, "Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life: A Redefinition," in Arnold Rose, ed., *Human Behavior and Social Process: An Interactionist Approach* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), pp. 633-638.

4. Harlan Douglass, *The Suburban Trend* (New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1970), p. 8. The book was first published in 1925.

5. Bessie L. Pierce, *A History of Chicago, 1871-1893* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 51; Tello J. D'Apery, pp. 62-63, discusses commuter rail development in Philadelphia.

## NORTHERN WEST PHILADELPHIA 1880



were often forced to endure, disturbed other urban residents. Reformers, viewing congestion and lack of family privacy as two major sources of all urban ills, generally concluded that an essential step in curing the disease of urban America was to persuade as many people as possible to move out of center city. The reformers' plea for greater decentralization was also related to fears of social unrest. Many believed that unless the urban working class could realistically aspire to home ownership, and thereby acquire a stake in American society, it would turn to revolution. In order for the majority of city dwellers to achieve the ideal of home ownership, residential decentralization was necessary. In short, suburbanization was seen as a panacea for many of the social problems confronting Americans during a turbulent era.<sup>6</sup>

6. In 1880, Italian and Russian Jewish immigrants together totalled 1932 persons. By 1890 their numbers collectively had reached 14,678 and by 1900 they had increased to 46,781, a 242 percent increase over a twenty year period. These figures are from Carol Golab, "The Polish Communities of Philadelphia, 1870-1920: Immigrant Distribution and Adaptation in Urban America," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1970), pp. 19-20. On the issue of the reformers' plea for suburbanization as an antidote for chaos or revolution, see Adna Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 475; and Andrew Wright Crawford, "The Interrelation of Housing and City Planning," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 51 (January 1914):165-166.

In Philadelphia, as in other cities, the suburban movement affected the entire urban structure. In this essay, however, my primary concern is with the outer city, since that was the locus of the initial thrust of suburban development. What existing patterns of the outer city were modified or destroyed by the suburban advance? How was the community structure affected? In order to clearly illustrate the impact of suburbanization, it is necessary to contrast the pre-suburban structure of the outer city to the patterns developed during the suburbanization process.

The dispersal of the urban population to Philadelphia's outer city first became significant during the 1880s. Until that time, most Philadelphians lived in a small urban sector. The urban sector was only sixteen square miles in area yet it contained more than seventy-one percent of the city's population.<sup>7</sup> It was remarkably heterogeneous; rich, poor, and modestly prosperous citizens all shared the same small urban space. Even the most fashionable residential district was still located in the heart of the city. Sociologist E. Digby Baltzell notes that during this period, "there were more upper-class families living on Walnut Street (between Broad Street and the Schuylkill River) than in all of Bryn Mawr on the Main Line."<sup>8</sup> Although some very small scale suburbanization among the upper class had been in progress since the early 1870s, the overwhelming majority of the city's elite remained in their neighborhoods along Chestnut, Walnut, Spruce, and Pine streets through the decade of the eighties.

Immediately to the south of the upper-class residential district was centered the densest concentration of black Philadelphians. Scattered throughout the urban sector were working and middle-class native whites, as well as immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and England. People of moderate means were interspersed with the wealthy. Luxurious townhouses fronted the major thoroughfares while small cramped row houses jammed the back alleys and side streets. Business

7. The "urban sector" of Philadelphia was illustrated on a map originally drawn in 1884 and reprinted in City of Philadelphia Transit Commissioner, *Report of the Transit Commissioner* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1913), n.p. Within the sixteen square mile urban sector, the street railway fare was a uniform six cents. It cost as much as twice that to ride outside this area. *Philadelphia Today* (Philadelphia: John W. Ryan, 1882), pp. 99-110, describes the routes and fares for all lines in the city.

8. E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: the Making of a National Upper Class* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958), pp. 185-186. The term "Main Line" originally referred to the route line of the Pennsylvania Railroad from Philadelphia West. It has since come to refer to the communities served along that route, which are still Philadelphia's most prestigious suburbs.

and commercial enterprises competed with homes for space. The urban sector was compact, densely settled, and diverse in terms of both population and function.<sup>9</sup>

The sixteen square mile area that comprised the urban sector of Philadelphia in 1880 was only a small part of the entire city. The outer city, which contained 113 square miles, was a startling contrast. Although located within the city limits, the outer city almost completely lacked urban characteristics. Thinly settled and isolated from the mainstream of urban life, it was as nonurban as a small town or rural area. Some sections of the outer city were devoted to farming; others were more industrial, but all were only marginally connected to the city. During the decade of the eighties, much of this would be changed. Beginning at that time, several areas within the outer city were transformed from nonurban working-class industrial settlements into residential communities.

My analysis of the process of early suburbanization is drawn mainly from a study of six communities within Philadelphia's outer city. The six communities together comprise the area of Northern West Philadelphia, one of the earliest locations of suburban development.<sup>10</sup> In 1880 Northern West Philadelphia contained farms, woodlands, country estates of the wealthy, several small industrial-residential communities, and even a squatter settlement. A small population—about 14,250—had settled here. Density ranged from two to ten persons per acre, compared to fifty-seven in the urban sector. Most of the residents lived in three of the six sections: The old villages of Haddington and Hestonville and an area later known as Mill Creek. The other three—present-day Overbrook, Wynnefield, and Morris Park—were very sparsely populated.<sup>11</sup>

9. Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), pp. 55–57.

10. The term "Northern West Philadelphia" is a condensation of the usual name for this area—"the northern part of West Philadelphia." Although I have heard the former term used, the latter is more common, but too awkward to use repeatedly.

11. For a discussion of community boundaries, see W. W. Weaver, *West Philadelphia: A Study of Natural Social Areas* (Philadelphia: By the Author, 1930), p. 90; and Mary W. Herman, et al., "Introductory Survey of Social Areas in West Philadelphia," mimeographed, (Philadelphia Health and Welfare Council, 1963). I computed the population density figures for the urban sector from published census records for 1880. The figures for Northern West Philadelphia were computed from manuscript records for 1880 (Ward 24, of which the area was a part), based on a systematic sample of ten percent of the households of the area. Information on types of settlement patterns were derived from an analysis of property atlases of the Twenty-fourth Ward for 1879 and 1884. Copies of the atlases were in the possession of Theodore Hershberg of the Philadelphia Social History Project, who allowed me to use them.

The major attraction of Northern West Philadelphia in its pre-suburban period seems to have been the jobs available there. While the outer city did not offer the multiplicity of employment opportunities found in the urban sector, it did contain specific types of industry. These included (1) those that relied on local natural resources and (2) nuisance industries that were unwelcome in a heavily populated area. Examples of such business enterprises were small textile mills dependent on water power provided by the abundant streams, and brickyards that used the local red clay. The principal nuisance industry was livestock slaughtering; there were several stockyards and a large slaughterhouse and meatpacking plant in Mill Creek.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence gathered from manuscript census records supports the hypothesis that the settled portions of the outer city before suburbanization consisted primarily of working-class industrial-residential areas. As Table 1 suggests, approximately seventy-eight percent of the total number of employed residents were estimated to be working in Northern West Philadelphia. Another seven percent held jobs in a nearby section of West Philadelphia, a short ride away on the horse-drawn street car. Less than two percent were identifiable as downtown commuters.<sup>13</sup>

Just as most residents worked near their homes, so too, most of them held jobs as manual laborers. Again according to manuscript census records, more than eighty percent of the employed residents of Northern West Philadelphia were engaged in blue collar occupations. When compared to a city-wide total of about fifty-five percent manual workers, the overwhelming working-class character of the outer city becomes obvious.<sup>14</sup>

The structure of the outer city that had existed in 1880—a high degree of class homogeneity, a settlement pattern composed of a mix of homes and industry, and virtual isolation from the city and urban

12. Information on industries was drawn from *Gopsill's Philadelphia Business Directory* (Philadelphia: Gopsill Publishing Co., 1879 and 1884).

13. The occupational data is from the sample taken from manuscript census records discussed above, which totalled 1392 individuals. The estimates of workplaces are based on an analysis of employment opportunities in Northern West Philadelphia and adjacent areas, from *Gopsill's Philadelphia Business Directory*. Some jobs were available in two areas, but the overlap was not great enough to affect the basic thrust of my contention, which is that most people lived near their places of employment.

14. Sample of manuscript census data, 1880; calculations for the entire city computed from published census records. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Population*, p. 894.

TABLE 1  
EMPLOYMENT LOCATIONS OF RESIDENTS  
OF NORTHERN WEST PHILADELPHIA

Total number in sample	1392	
Total number employed	523	100%
Workers estimated to be working in Northern West Philadelphia	410	78.4
Workers estimated to be employed in other parts of West Philadelphia	36	6.9
Workers estimated to have commuted to center city	8	1.6
Number for whom it was impossible to determine employment location	69	13.2

Source: Sample of manuscript census returns, 1880.

TABLE 2  
OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION, NORTHERN  
WEST PHILADELPHIA, 1880

Total in Sample      1392

	Number	Percent
Total employed	523	100.0
Unskilled, Semi-skilled, and Service Workers	238	45.5
Skilled manual workers	190	36.3
Lower non-manual workers (clerical, sales, civil service)	27	5.2
Managerial, business, professional	68	13.0

Source: Sample of manuscript census returns, 1880.

lifestyles—underwent rapid alterations in the following two decades. During the late eighties and early nineties the small scale suburban trend among the wealthy that was mentioned earlier, began to quicken. From that time on, greater numbers of Philadelphia's most prominent citizens sold their townhouses to become fulltime

suburban residents.<sup>15</sup> The urban aristocracy was joined in this exodus by the merely wealthy and then by growing numbers of the middle and working classes. The movement of the upper class was significant, if only because it had initiated the trend toward residential dispersal. But the other groups, because of the numbers involved, had the greatest impact on future development. The hereditary elite, after all, retired to its country estates. The others required new housing to meet their needs and wishes.

The housing demand in the outer city was met in Philadelphia by two distinct types of suburban development: the planned community and the haphazardly constructed residential area. Both forms appeared in Northern West Philadelphia. The planned suburb was a rarity in any city during the late nineteenth century, which makes the one that was built in Philadelphia all the more interesting to historians. Overbrook Farms, as the development was named by its planners, was located in Overbrook at the western boundary of the city, in virtual isolation from the rest of Philadelphia. Designed to attract an upper-class market, Overbrook Farms was one of the earliest successful planned communities. In contrast to the vast majority of the residential building of the period, its development anticipated many of the patterns of the mid-twentieth century suburb.<sup>16</sup>

It is unclear in retrospect whether the developers of Overbrook Farms were imbued with that suburban vision which seemed so important to the upper-middle and upper classes during the period, or whether they simply sought a successful marketing method. Whatever their motives, their plans were quite astute. They created a much more expensive and exclusive forerunner of such modern packaged suburbs as the Levittowns. The new suburb was built at the edge of the city on an old country estate of 850 acres. Construction was begun in 1893, and for some years after its completion the area remained separated from other residential communities by several hundred acres of undeveloped land. The bucolic setting of Overbrook Farms allowed its developers to present it, confidently, as the perfect

15. Baltzell, p. 186.

16. It was not one of the first suburbs. Llewellyn Park, New Jersey (1853) and Lake Forest Illinois (1855) were much earlier, but they were conceived as religious undertakings. See John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). Garden City, Long Island had also been partially developed, but had only become successful in the nineties. Baltzell, p. 204, mentions the construction of a large development in Wayne, Pennsylvania in 1881, which was also initially unsuccessful.



marriage of urban and pastoral lifestyles. According to their promotional literature, "the country seems to be the ideal place for a home, except for a jarring note—the country home usually means so many uncomfortable things." At Overbrook Farms, on the other hand, "the pure air and sunshine of the country, the abundant trees, the sweeping lawns and gardens, form a setting for homes with all the city comforts and conveniences."<sup>17</sup>

Overbrook Farms contained many of the physical features that Americans today view as distinctly suburban. Its street plans followed the strictures of the most advanced town planning, utilizing curved drives rather than the typical nineteenth century grid pattern. Its houses were, for the most part, spacious detached dwellings on large lots, although a few elegant semi-detached homes were also built. Each house was set thirty-five feet from the street, allowing for an expanse of tree-shaded grass between the family and the outside world. Some of these features are quite common in today's upper-middle class suburb, but at the turn of the century they were available only to the wealthy. A middle class family could not have afforded to live here. In 1894, when the average price for a house and lot in Philadelphia ranged from \$1,000 to \$3,000 and an expensive home cost about \$7,500, those at Overbrook Farms sold at between \$7,000 to \$25,000—most at the upper end of the spectrum.<sup>18</sup>

The new suburbanites who purchased homes in the development were largely independent professionals and corporate executives. Of the twenty-one household heads for whom it was possible to determine occupational status as of 1899, ten were high-level executives. The remainder were in the professions—law, medicine, dentistry, and engineering. A very high proportion were commuters. At least seventy-six percent of the household heads had their offices in center city. The commuters availed themselves of the vastly improved service of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which by 1899 had increased the number of trains along this route to sixty-four a day, compared to six in 1880, and had decreased its fare from fourteen cents to six cents for a one-way commuter trip. In addition to the train, trolley service was extended to Overbrook Farms in 1895, but residents much preferred the train to

17. Wendell and Smith, *Managers of Overbrook Farms*, *Overbrook Farms: A Suburb Deluxe* (Philadelphia: By the Authors, 1905), p. 1; Wendell and Smith, *A Little Talk with the Homeseeker* (Philadelphia: By the Authors, 1899).

18. Frank H. Taylor and William B. McManus, *The City of Philadelphia as it Appears in the Year 1894* (Philadelphia: the Trades League, 1894), p. 186; D'Apery, *Overbrook Farms*, p. 74.

the trolley. They seemed to consider the latter much more suitable transportation for their "reverse-commuting" household servants.<sup>19</sup>

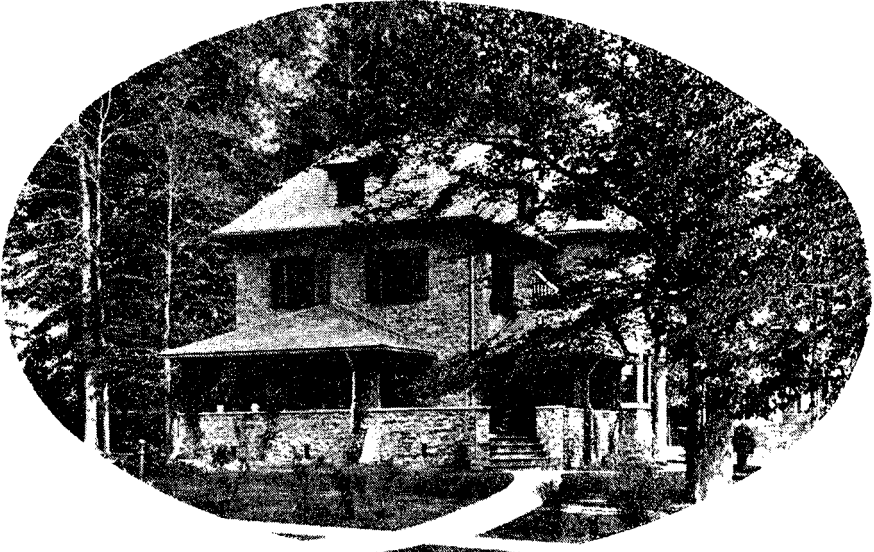
The families who moved to Overbrook Farms were a part of that group which sociologists now refer to as the lower-upper class; they had wealth, and a number of them were prominent in civic affairs, but they were not members of Philadelphia's hereditary elite. Given the fact that the traditional upper class had already chosen not to reside in designed suburbs, it seems quite likely that the developers were well aware that their appeal was to the former group. They obviously knew their market well. The promoters of Overbrook Farms skillfully connected the new suburb with the exclusive Main Line communities, in which the elite did reside. The new suburb was located near these towns, and its commuters even rode the same trains, which stopped at Overbrook Station. The developers shrewdly exploited the locational relationship, emphasizing the prestige that would accrue to the buyer of one of their homes, and noting that many "prominent men" had already moved into the area.<sup>20</sup>

The almost immediate success of Overbrook Farms suggests to the historian that planned suburban communities met a very real need among urban residents in the late nineteenth century. It may also tell us something about the reasons behind the lure of the suburb in general. From the beginning, the residents of Overbrook Farms seem to have enjoyed a high degree of community cohesiveness, for which the developers deserve a large share of the credit. The planners of Overbrook Farms not only provided such amenities as a small shopping center with a grocery and a pharmacy, but also offered free land to several denominations for church construction and provided club space for social activities. The first community organizations included a social and athletic club for men established in 1896 and a social and civic club for women created in 1900. The early residents of Overbrook Farms seemed in agreement with the developers' ideas of a community social life, since most of them apparently belonged to the two societies. Both clubs were politically as well as socially active, participating in campaigns for reform government and better municipal services.<sup>21</sup>

19. D'Apéry, *Overbrook Farms*, pp. 62, 72-74. The occupations of household heads were located in the *Philadelphia City Directory*, 1899, after their names had been located in the suburb's private telephone directory. Wendell and Smith, *Telephones at Overbrook Farms* (Philadelphia: By the Authors, 1899).

20. Wendell and Smith, *A Little Talk with the Homeseeker*; Wendell and Smith, *Overbrook Farms, A Suburb Deluxe*, p. 1; Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, p. 193.

21. D'Apéry, *Overbrook Farms*, pp. 90-97.



A HOME IN OVERBROOK FARMS  
*Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*

Overbrook Farms was an unusual feature of the late nineteenth century suburban landscape. The construction of a unified large-scale development was uncommon not only in Philadelphia but in the rest of the country as well. The conscious effort of a builder to create community institutions, even ones so commonplace as churches and shopping centers, was even more unusual. It is this attempt to create a sense of community among the residents that marked Overbrook Farms as different, even from the few other “planned” suburbs of the period. Unless a suburb was conceived as a religious venture (such as Lake Forest, Illinois or Llewellyn Park, New Jersey) developers were mostly concerned with selling lots, and their commitment to the creation of community cohesiveness extended only to the planning of a few parks and green spaces, at best. In Ridley Park, a 600-acre suburb to the south of Philadelphia, the developers planned the street layout and allowed for a few parks. Other than that, they simply tried to sell parcels of land. They neither built houses nor attempted to build a community.<sup>22</sup>

Why did such extensive planning go into the development of Overbrook Farms? Perhaps the plans were born of necessity, since the suburb was located in an undeveloped area at considerable distance

22. Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*, pp. 121 and 135; Reys, pp. 339–342; Davis and Grafflin, Real Estate Agency, *Rural Homes: Beautiful Suburban Homes at Ridley Park and Sharon Hill* (Philadelphia: By the Authors, 1881?), *passim*.

from the city. Yet if necessity were sufficient explanation, one would expect most other outlying suburbs to have followed the same practice, which they did not. There is another possible explanation. Perhaps the creation of community organizations reflected the desire of developers and residents alike to emulate the country clubs and social life that the city's hereditary elite had established for themselves. It seems also quite likely that the development of the several community institutions indicated a desire on the part of the residents to retain—or regain—a measure of neighborhood cohesion and communality.

In its planned aspects—shopping centers, community institutions, churches—Overbrook Farms foreshadowed the modern suburban community. The concept of a shopping center has expanded to embrace the huge malls that dominate the suburban landscape today, and the homes are more likely to be imitation colonial styles than the elegant Tudor and Victorian houses that characterized Overbrook Farms, but the conscious attempt to create a community is common to both Overbrook Farms and such twentieth century suburbs as the Levittowns. Aesthetically and architecturally the former may have been more pleasing, but many of the same ideas, modified to suit the budget of the average family, are utilized today.<sup>23</sup>

Designed suburbs are the norm today even for middle-income families. In the late nineteenth century, however, they were limited to the well-to-do. This does not mean that suburbanization itself was beyond the reach of the average Philadelphian. Many middle and working-class families left the densely settled urban sector in the late eighties and early nineties. They moved to an outer city that was growing to accommodate them—growing in a haphazard and sporadic manner. Most early suburban building, unlike Overbrook Farms, was quite disorganized. The economic situation of the late nineteenth century dictated this pattern. During these years most residential construction remained in the hands of a multitude of small capitalists who were prepared to risk only small sums, perhaps a few thousand dollars. Wealthier investors tended to speculate in more profitable corporate finance, leaving the housing industry for the most part in the hands of the small investors. The creation of a suburb like Overbrook Farms, which entailed great financial outlay and considerable risk, was too difficult a project for most builders. As a result, the largest

23. Herbert Gans, "The Suburban Community and its Way of Life," in Robert Gutman and David Popenoe, eds., *Neighborhood, City and Metropolis* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 298.

portion of the outer city, including much of Northern West Philadelphia, was developed in keeping with the modest aspirations of the small contractor. A man with only a limited amount of capital with which to speculate was careful to take as little risk as possible with his money.<sup>24</sup>

The conservatism of the early suburban builders was amply evident. The most prevalent housing type in Philadelphia had traditionally been the red brick row home. When middle and working class families moved to the outer city, the row home still prevailed. The houses of the outer city tended to be larger than those of the urban sector, with more light and air and often with small patches of lawn, but the concept remained essentially unchanged. Occasionally a block or two of detached or semi-detached houses interrupted the pattern, but for the most part, late-nineteenth century residential areas like Northern West Philadelphia perpetuated the style of the urban sector.<sup>25</sup>

Northern West Philadelphia experienced suburban growth on a significant scale during the late eighties and early nineties. In the northern section of Haddington, where fewer than two-hundred fifty dwellings stood in 1885, there were nearly a thousand in 1895. In the previously undeveloped western part of Mill Creek, which had contained only ninety-one houses in 1885, there were five-hundred fifty ten years later. These new homes attracted Philadelphians who could afford to pay a somewhat higher price for a house in a suburban section, as the houses cost approximately fifty percent more than a row home in the urban sector or an industrial section.<sup>26</sup> It should be mentioned that as suburbanization occurred in Northern West Philadelphia, most of the industries that had been present earlier disappeared, either going out of business completely or relocating in other parts of the city. Suburban development hastened the separation of

24. Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*, p. 124; Roy Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), pp. 36-39.

25. Analysis of *Property Atlases of the City of Philadelphia*, 1884 (Ward 24) and 1911 (Wards 34 and 44). The latter available at the Archives of the City of Philadelphia.

26. Numbers of houses built were computed from the Pennsylvania State Emergency Relief Administration, *Report of the Philadelphia Real Estate Survey: Residential Structures*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1934), 1:339-372, and 2:361-366. The housing cost figures were computed from the *Office Files of the Philadelphia Housing Association* typewritten, n.d. (1910?), located in the Urban Archives of Temple University; and "The Housing Awakening: One Million People in Small Houses—Philadelphia," *Survey* (January 1911), p. 232. The former supplied data for Northern West Philadelphia, the latter for the urban and industrial areas.

business and residential areas, a part of the overall differentiation of function that came with metropolitan growth.<sup>27</sup>

This early residential development of the outer city signalled the beginnings of the modern mass suburban movement. Housing in Northern West Philadelphia was more expensive than in the urban sector, but it was not priced for the wealthy. Rather the potential market included the teacher, bookkeeper, clerk, and skilled blue-collar worker. For the first time, ordinary citizens chose a neighborhood not on the basis of its proximity to their places of employment, but for precisely the opposite reason. Now, a family whose employed members could afford the cost of commuting preferred to live in a residential community. Homes were constructed on or near the existing trolley lines to the center city, and new lines were established.<sup>28</sup>

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What did the average Philadelphia family expect from its new home in the suburbs? Was the rationale for leaving the crowded city the same for the teacher or salesman as it was for the corporate executive who moved to Overbrook Farms? While the records of Overbrook Farms provide the historian with a relatively clear description of the emerging suburban community structure, it is more difficult to interpret the data from the middle- and working-class neighborhoods. Although the evidence is somewhat cloudy, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions from a comparison of the community structure during its nonurban period to the structure that emerged during the early suburban phase. If we examine the outer city in 1880 and again in 1900, it seems clear that whatever the original expectations of the departing urbanites, their move to the suburbs transformed the existing community forms.

In 1880, the patterns of social interaction in Northern West Philadelphia, and probably in the rest of the outer city as well, were based on informal neighborhood structure. Most people had little use for formal organizations. In all, there were only three churches and four fraternal associations in the entire area. Of all the residents, only the Irish maintained an institutional structure that included a Catholic

27. Gopsill's *Philadelphia Business Directory*, 1895.

28. William S. Twining, *A Study and Review of the Problem of Passenger Transportation in Philadelphia by a United System of Lines* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1916), pp. 52-53; Department of City Transit, "History of Rapid Transit in Philadelphia," Philadelphia, 1930, *passim*.

church served by an Irish priest which welcomed only Irish worshippers. The church also sponsored social functions. Why the Irish alone would have felt the need for a formal community structure at this particular time is not entirely clear. Perhaps their residential integration within the settled areas led them to stress organizational unity as a means of preserving their cultural and religious identity. In 1880, no other racial, ethnic, or economic group was as careful of its community cohesiveness as the Irish. Black residents of Northern West Philadelphia, in fact, did not have a single church or fraternal club.<sup>29</sup>

Community structure during the nonurban stage of the development of the outer city was therefore based on informality. Residents of a neighborhood often worked in the same mill or brickyard, and in some cases occupational ties were strengthened by ethnic or cultural bonds. Isolated from the congestion and complexity of urban life, they did not create elaborate social mechanisms. These generalizations did not apply to the owners of the large country estates, but they formed only a small part of the total population. The importance of the neighborhood was reflected in the physical isolation of communities from each other. While the street railway linked some of the settlements and provided a means of getting out of the neighborhood and into the city, most of the day-to-day contacts occurred on a very local scale.

The typical resident of Northern West Philadelphia in 1880 was working-class, lived near his job, and was for the most part family- and neighborhood-centered. The men spent their time at work or at home, and they probably visited one of the small beer halls or saloons that dotted several of the more densely settled neighborhoods. Women, unless they were single, separated from their husbands, or black, apparently spent their time at home.<sup>30</sup> In general, there seems to have been heavy reliance on the informal aspects of communality, and very little stress on formal organizations to create a community structure.

By 1900 the influx of new residents had dramatically altered the community structure of Northern West Philadelphia. Formal social organizations had proliferated, reducing the emphasis on family and

29. Personal Communication from Reverend James Daly, pastor of Our Mother of Sorrows Church in 1972. The Irish priest turned up in the manuscript census sample data. Information on other formal communal structures (or in this case, lack of them) was drawn from *Gopsill's Philadelphia Business Directory*, 1879 and 1884.

30. Sample of Manuscript Census data.

neighborhood. In the case of the churches, a three-fold increase in the area's population between 1880 and 1900 prompted a seven-fold increase in the number of churches. While the population had grown from 14,250 to 43,708, the number of churches grew from three to twenty-two. Some of the new churches served particular ethnic groups. For example, two black churches and a second Irish church were built. Most churches, however, were "neighborhood churches" that drew their congregations from a small local area, probably reflecting the fact that the majority of new residents were neither immigrants nor blacks.<sup>31</sup>

Fraternal societies also grew rapidly as Northern West Philadelphia felt the first effects of suburbanization. Such social organizations had been significant elements of urban associational life since the second quarter of the nineteenth century, but their popularity had not extended to the outer city at that time. Their great expansion in the late nineteenth century in places outside the urban sectors of great cities suggests that they now filled a need that had earlier been met by more informal measures.

As suburban areas grew and neighborhoods became larger and somewhat more impersonal the social clubs provided a sense of community. To a degree, the fraternal societies, like the neighborhood-churches, institutionalized the concept of neighborhood solidarity, and offered communal support to their members. Persons who belonged to these clubs helped each other to find jobs and the organization itself was a source of aid in case of illness or other emergencies. The amount and kind of help a man received depended on both the organization and the individual chapter, but all fraternal societies had one common aspect—a life insurance plan known as a death benefit for each member. Some clubs included accident and illness in their formal plans as well.

Only four fraternal clubs had existed in Northern West Philadelphia in 1880, but by 1900 there were seventeen. The expansion of such groups during this period illustrated both the need of people to maintain a sense of community in an increasingly impersonal environment, and the inability of work or neighborhood to totally fulfill that need any longer. The lodge not only assured its members of help in

31. *Gopsill's Philadelphia Business Directory*, 1895. Robert D. Cross, ed., *The Church and the City* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967), introduction. Most of the new churches in Northern West Philadelphia were very inconvenient to public transit, which strengthens the argument that they served rather small areas, since this was the pre-automobile era.



times of distress, but it also satisfied men's urges to belong to an exclusive group bound together by ties of ritual, secrecy, and symbolic brotherhood.<sup>32</sup> The widespread appeal of the fraternal organizations is even more strongly emphasized by the appearance of women's branches in several of the lodges.

Both fraternal organizations and the neighborhood churches brought some measure of community cohesiveness to the suburbanizing outer city. As the isolated small settlement gave way to the larger residential area, the church and the social club took over many of the functions of the neighborhood. That does not imply that close contact no longer existed among neighbors; such informal relationships are very difficult to measure. The increased utilization of formal organizations does suggest, however, that the informal structures were unable to fully meet the needs of the outer city communities. Formal organizations, after all, offered a kind of "instant" communality. They provided an opportunity for new residents to experience a sense of group cohesiveness which might otherwise have taken a long time to develop. In areas where most of the people were newcomers, that factor should not be underestimated.

Many of the new social organizations that developed in the outer city during the late nineteenth century were nativist or otherwise exclusionary, demonstrating that a desire for cultural and ethnic homogeneity was a part of suburbanization from its inception. Although in a physical sense, widespread ethnic and racial segregation was still some years in the future for the outer city, its groundwork was laid in this period. The creation of residential areas in which housing costs were more uniform than in the urban sector was an important step in the direction of separating the population by economic status, even though the outcome of such differentiation would take several decades to become visible. The slow growth of residential segregation itself seems surprising, but can be understood as one aspect of the building process. In many of the newly suburbanized sections of the outer city, vestiges of the older nonurban settlement remained. These homes, cramped and old-fashioned according to the more expensive standards of the newer residents, were most often inhabited by families of lower status than the rest of the community. Such intermingling of housing gave the outer city an integrated appearance.<sup>33</sup>

32. B. H. Meyer, "Fraternal Beneficiary Societies in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology*, 6 (March 1901): 647-661; Charles Fergusen, *Fifty Million Branches* (New York: Farrar and Reinhart, 1937), pp. 98-100 and 191.

33. *Gopsill's Philadelphia Business Directory*, 1895, pp. 535-549; Arthur A. Preuss, *A*

The lack of physical segregation in the late nineteenth century, therefore, did not reflect a commitment to residential heterogeneity on the part of suburban-oriented Philadelphians. Rather it stimulated their use of alternative methods of cultural or ethnic separation. The church and much more importantly the social organization provided the means. All of the fraternal clubs in Northern West Philadelphia excluded blacks and most of them also kept out immigrants and Catholics. Even if the lodges had welcomed them Catholics were prohibited by the Church from joining secret societies. To compensate for this loss parishes created clubs of their own for church members. In short, despite a prevailing pattern of residential integration, the community institutions of the new middle and working class suburban areas encouraged segregation.

By the turn of the century the general prerequisites for mass suburbanization had been established. The wealthy had begun to move to the edge of the city and beyond, while middle and working class residential areas were spread throughout the outer city. The first phase of suburbanization also laid the foundation for the emergence of the segregated metropolis during the 1910s and 1920s. Although the dramatic, full-scale flight from the city that has captured the imagination of urban analysts did not occur until after World War I with the widespread use of the automobile, both the characteristics and the attitudes that motivated the explosive suburban movement were set in place by 1900.

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*Dictionary of Secret and Other Societies* (New York: Herder Book Company, 1924), passim; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), pp. 57–58; the comparatively late development of residential segregation in Philadelphia is discussed in my dissertation. Margaret S. Marsh, "The Transformation of Community: Suburbanization and Urbanization in Northern West Philadelphia, 1880–1930." (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1974), pp. 134–141.

#### LOST AND FOUND DEPARTMENT

A nine ton casting fell off a platform car of the Pennsylvania Railroad lately and was not missed until the car reached the Edgar Thomson Steel Works at Bessemer, where the operation of the works had to be suspended some time on account of its loss. The casting was finally found in the Susquehanna River near Columbia.

[*The Railroad Gazette*, 24 (8 January 1892): 28.]

CONTRIBUTED BY THOMAS MARCY, WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA.