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THE EMERGING SUBURB: WEST PHILADELPHIA, 1850-1880¹

AFTER a long period of neglect, the suburbs have come in for their share of scholarly attention. Indeed, some of the most interesting recent urban research has attempted to shed light on the nature, form, and antecedents of modern suburbanization. This is as it should be. Suburbs, once seen as the solution to urban problems, since they provided growing room for increasingly congested nineteenth-century cities, have now become, to paraphrase an irate turn-of-the-century citizen protesting Chicago's attempt to annex the community of Oak Park, "the hair of the tail that wags the dog."² As Peter Muller has pointed out, "suburbs are no longer just 'bedrooms' for the city; they are becoming much more important as a location for all kinds of activities, and especially higher-order activities like sports, cultural events, and corporate headquarters."³

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2. Paraphrased from Arthur LeGacy, *Improvers and Preservers: A History of Oak Park, Illinois* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1967). Quoted in Kenneth T. Jackson, "Metropolitan Government Versus Suburban Autonomy: Politics on the Crabgrass Frontier", in Jackson & Schultz, eds., *Cities in American History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1972).

3. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 July 1978, p. 7-C.

Considerable scholarly interest has been awakened about the ancestry of modern suburbia. Of particular note have been articles and books defining suburbia and categorizing suburban types; works describing suburban development in individual cities; and monographs on the effect of transportation and construction practices on the form of early suburbs, and on the various social and historical forces which produced late nineteenth-century suburbs of relatively homogeneous social class.⁴ Various themes run through much of this literature. Opinion seems to be divided on the question of whether suburbs have to be politically independent of the cities with which they are associated. While early practice was to categorize as suburbs only politically independent areas exogenous to the city, analysts from Harlan Douglass through Margaret March have taken the more sensible view that political dependence or independence is not central to the definition of a suburb.⁵ The question of suburban economic dependence on the center city has also plagued researchers. It was recognized early on that the residents of early industrial suburbs might have little formal or functional connection with the center cities upon which their work places were economically dependent.⁶ Muller's recent work indicates that this economic dependence may even have been characteristic of one stage in suburban development, rather than a necessary component of all suburbs.⁷

Another related question which has been addressed concerns the typical suburban development process. Warner noted that in Boston's suburbs the original low-density development represented by single-family homes on large lots was ultimately replaced by much denser growth. The large, original lots were subdivided to

4. Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. and Harvard University Press, 1962); David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Gregory Singleton, "The Genesis of Suburbia: A Complex of Historical Trends" in Louis Masotti and Jeffrey Haddon, eds., *The Urbanization of the Suburbs* (Beverly Hills: Russell Sage, 1973); Harlan Paul Douglass, *The Suburban Trend* (New York: Century, 1925); Graham Taylor, *Satellite Cities: A Study of Industrial Suburbs* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1915); Richard Sennett, *Families Against the City: Middle Class Homes of Industrial Chicago, 1872-90* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); et al.

5. Harlan Paul Douglass, op. cit.; and Margaret March, "Suburbanization and the Search for Community: Residential Decentralization in Philadelphia, 1880-1900", in *Pennsylvania History*, 44: 2.

6. Graham Taylor, op. cit.

7. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, op. cit.

provide more modest homes for increasingly less well-to-do middle-class refugees from the city's congestion, after transportation links to these areas opened them for settlement by such newcomers. Simultaneously, a move toward annexation with the main city often occurred, sparked by a desire to benefit from the typically better-developed physical and social services of the city, particularly water and sewage on the one hand, and schools on the other. This trend continued until the turn of the century, when a sudden reversal took place. Potential suburbs began to perceive that they were actually losing more than their political autonomy by throwing their lot in with the urban government. As cities were hit with wave after wave of immigrants, as political administrations were hit with charges of corruption, as the quality of urban life declined, and as the urban tax base decreased and services to be supported increased, affiliation was no longer attractive for the generally wealthier suburbs.⁸

Finally, scholars have questioned how universal various suburban forms actually were. To some extent, the contemporary homogenized image of suburbia is a result of its characterization by social scientists as a post-World War II phenomenon based on automobile access.⁹ Inferring backwards from modern forms, it has been all too easy to view the axiomatic sameness of today's suburbs as having been produced by a single interrelated set of processes operating similarly in different locales during the nineteenth century. To be sure, there were forces which promoted uniformity in the absence of the large-scale development typical of modern suburban growth. As Warner noted, mortgage practices in Boston, which required rapid turnover of houses built by small developers, served as a deterrent to radical house design. Small-scale development and a desire to maximize return on subdivided plots of land promoted a grid system of streets, in which all lots were either the same size or multiples of a basic size, thus eliminating the possibility that odd-shaped lots might prove to be white elephants on the hands of either developers or builders.¹⁰ The proliferation of articles in nineteenth-century middle-class journals about suburban houses, life-styles, and modes of dress, were avidly read by builders, developers, and potential suburbanites

8. Kenneth T. Jackson, *op. cit.*

9. See particularly, Editors of *Fortune*, *The Exploding Metropolis* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1958).

10. Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *op. cit.*

alike, and perpetuated a certain uniformity.¹¹ Finally, as Warner and Ward have noted, the nature and pace of transportation development to some extent determined the homogeneous class structure of suburbs built in newly-accessible areas, as new forms of streetcar transportation and the establishment of cross-town routes, linking points once accessible only on radial lines, provided job access to different types of workers.¹²

In general, however, among the aspects of suburbanization which have received less attention are the questions of when suburbs actually came into being, what ideas governed their physical design, and what happened to these early suburbs with the passage of time. Most studies refer to suburbanization as a process which occurred after 1880 for all but the extremely wealthy. While researchers admit that certain individuals lived in areas which could be considered suburban between 1825 and 1875, they limit their consideration of suburban lifestyle to the upper stratum of society—those having the economic wherewithal to own a house and grounds outside the center city. Yet even in 1850 individuals from what would now be considered the central middle class commuted regularly from some suburban areas to jobs in downtown Philadelphia. Few of them lived on large estates peripheral to the urban core. They commuted daily using transportation other than private carriages or the railroads, and the areas in which they lived were marked by an emerging small-scale homogeneity within a larger-scale heterogeneity of social class and ethnicity.

Study of the early history of the suburb of West Philadelphia provides a counterpoint to much of what has been written about suburban development. As the second-largest city in the United States during most of the nineteenth century, Philadelphia experienced severe growing pains. The booming city's rapacious appetite for land had swallowed up most of the area between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers by 1860, but certain far-sighted individuals had moved westward across the Schuylkill in the 1840s, using a well-developed omnibus system to commute to downtown jobs. During the early suburban development of West Philadelphia, land division, mortgaging, and building practices assured a remarkable degree of small-scale architectural and social homogeneity which in part replicated that of the old city. In addition, while planned subdivision is usually thought of as a

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, and David Ward, *op. cit.*

phenomenon of the period following 1880, developments which had many of the hallmarks of later suburban forms were begun in this area as early as 1850. Among the distinguishing characteristics of this early development was a planned uniformity of house style and price which attracted a relatively homogeneous social class of buyers and tenants. There resulted a mix of similar owner-occupied and leased homes which together formed exclusive suburban enclaves.

Nevertheless, each of these different enclaves was meant to satisfy the desires of a different type of exurbanite. It is a great mistake to think that everyone who fled the congestion of the core desired a single-family detached home set on a large plot of land. In Philadelphia, where land had been at a premium for twenty-five years, the attached townhouse was the symbol of wealth and success. Suburban builders, then, found themselves catering to a range of tastes, from those few desiring the illusion of a large single-family home set apart from its neighbors by a small yard, to those desiring an elegant brick row house embellished with cast metal hardware which mimicked the ostentatious brownstone and granite facades of Rittenhouse Square's denizens.

The spatial arrangement of these suburban homes, to a large extent, followed patterns that had been established in the old city. In the western part of the city, between the Schuylkill River and Broad Street, fashionable residences clustered on Chestnut and Walnut streets, major thoroughfares running in an east-west direction. Less pretentious homes of still-substantial citizens were built on the numbered streets running north-south. In the alleys and narrow interstitial streets between these wide thoroughfares, row housing of a decidedly lower class had been built, often simultaneously with the townhouses of the wealthy. Located over the back fence, with title frequently held by the wealthy inhabitant of the townhouse, these smaller rows provided a bit of extra income, and did not create any stigmatization of the neighborhood. The seeming heterogeneity of the early city had thus been first carried into the western reaches of the expanding industrial city in the 1840s and 50s. The same pattern was carried across the Schuylkill into the new suburb of West Philadelphia in the 1860s and 70s. While workers had always lived in this area, where they found local employment as drovers and butchers near the stockyards on Lancaster Pike, and in glass factories, lumberyards, and riverfront warehouses, new worker housing was also built in the smaller alley streets of West Philadelphia, particularly in the eastern part of the

suburb, as it had been in the older portions of the city. Social homogeneity, then, was found along the block front, but a relatively small spatial area could still exhibit considerable heterogeneity. Realizing this, builders and developers in West Philadelphia made their block fronts uniform, but often varied the composition of the square block. Where there existed a relatively large area of homogeneous social class, it was simply a case of development of parallel and adjacent uniform block fronts, without interstitial alleys to interrupt the pattern.

In describing the process of land subdivision, the physical design, and the social development of selected groups of homes in West Philadelphia, we hope to point out some of the different strategies that were employed by various entrepreneurs in creating the new suburb. By adapting old patterns to new needs, they eventually fashioned an area which comes very close to our modern conception of the suburb. The forms found in West Philadelphia represent the collaborative efforts of estate owners who held large parcels of land in the area, architects who were both attuned to prevailing popular styles and shapers of those styles, and builders who were capable of transforming visions into brick, stone, glass, and wood. We have chosen to study certain early developments that we feel illustrate patterns of land division, design, mortgaging or financing, and eventual tenancy which are representative of a large number of similar small-scale projects west of the Schuylkill.

THE EARLY COMMUNITY WEST OF THE SCHUYLKILL

The story of West Philadelphia, like that of most older suburban areas, is one of continuing change. The early pre-industrial settlements beyond the Schuylkill River grew through the nineteenth-century to become extensions of urban residential patterns to which they were at first alternatives. The oldest section of West Philadelphia, that just west of the river south of Market Street, has recently undergone a period of urban renewal which has all but eradicated evidence of its character as a residential district. Its role as refuge from the city has long since been taken over by new towns at the edge of the metropolitan region. Yet some traces remain of the early suburban developments in this area, known today as University City. Surviving mansions, twins, and rowhouses, constructed between 1850 and 1880, reveal the life of the neighborhood as it was a century or more ago. Those houses which still stand are the points of reference for

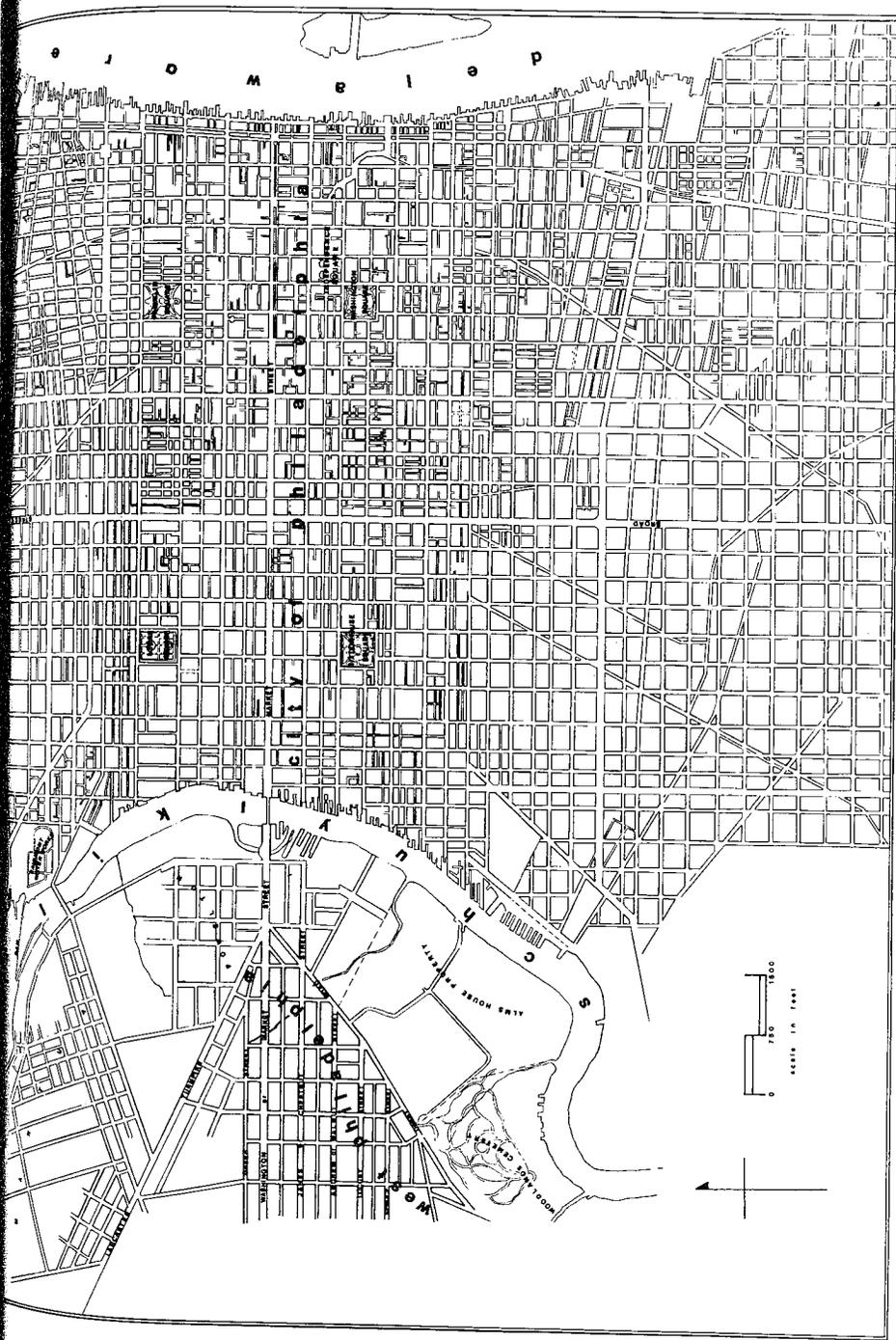


PLATE I. Philadelphia c. 1850. (McElroy's Map of Philadelphia.)

this study. Now isolated from their original context, they exemplify stages in the area's growth which resemble the pattern of settlement still prevailing farther west of this first suburb.¹³

The early life of West Philadelphia depended on its location both as a gateway to the city from the west and as a harbor along the Schuylkill (Plate 1). Before the coming of the railroad one of the major routes between the coastal region and the interior of Pennsylvania was the Lancaster Pike, a wagon road which ran northwest from the first permanent bridge over the river at Market Street completed in 1805. Darby Road, now Woodland Avenue, also joined Market Street at this spot and served as a principal land route to the southwest, linking Philadelphia with Chester, Wilmington, and Baltimore. The area around this juncture became an important point of exchange between city and country, with Market Street as its commercial center. The Schuylkill itself was first developed as an industrial river below the falls at Fairmount. The major landings along its western bank were concentrated just south of the bridge between the ends of Market and Chestnut Streets. Industry in the adjacent lowlands east of the present 32nd Street included foundries, lumbermills, and coal yards. These activities along the waterfront, together with smaller manufacture on the highways, were the basis of a local economic life which existed apart from that of the central city.¹⁴

The occupations of the people living along Market Street in 1850 reflected the area's identity both as a transshipment center and workshop. The village had long been known for its taverns, and there were nine inns along the ten block stretch of Market Street west of the bridge. The street was the home of tradesmen who served overland travelers, such as blacksmiths and wheelwrights, and lesser numbers allied with the river traffic, including boatbuilders and chandlers. A fifth of the men were in the building trades, though the majority were unskilled laborers. Half of the male residents were immigrants, most from Ireland, Germany, and England. At the west end of the settlement, near present-day 40th Street, lived a

13. For an architectural survey of West Philadelphia, see Edward Teitelman and Richard W. Longstreth, *Architecture in Philadelphia: A Guide* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1974), pp. 182-213.

14. For local history of West Philadelphia in the nineteenth century, see M. Lafitte Vieira, *West Philadelphia Illustrated* (Philadelphia, 1913) and Leon S. Rosenthal, *A History of Philadelphia's University City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Printing Office, 1963).

community of thirty-six black families with their own parish church.¹⁵

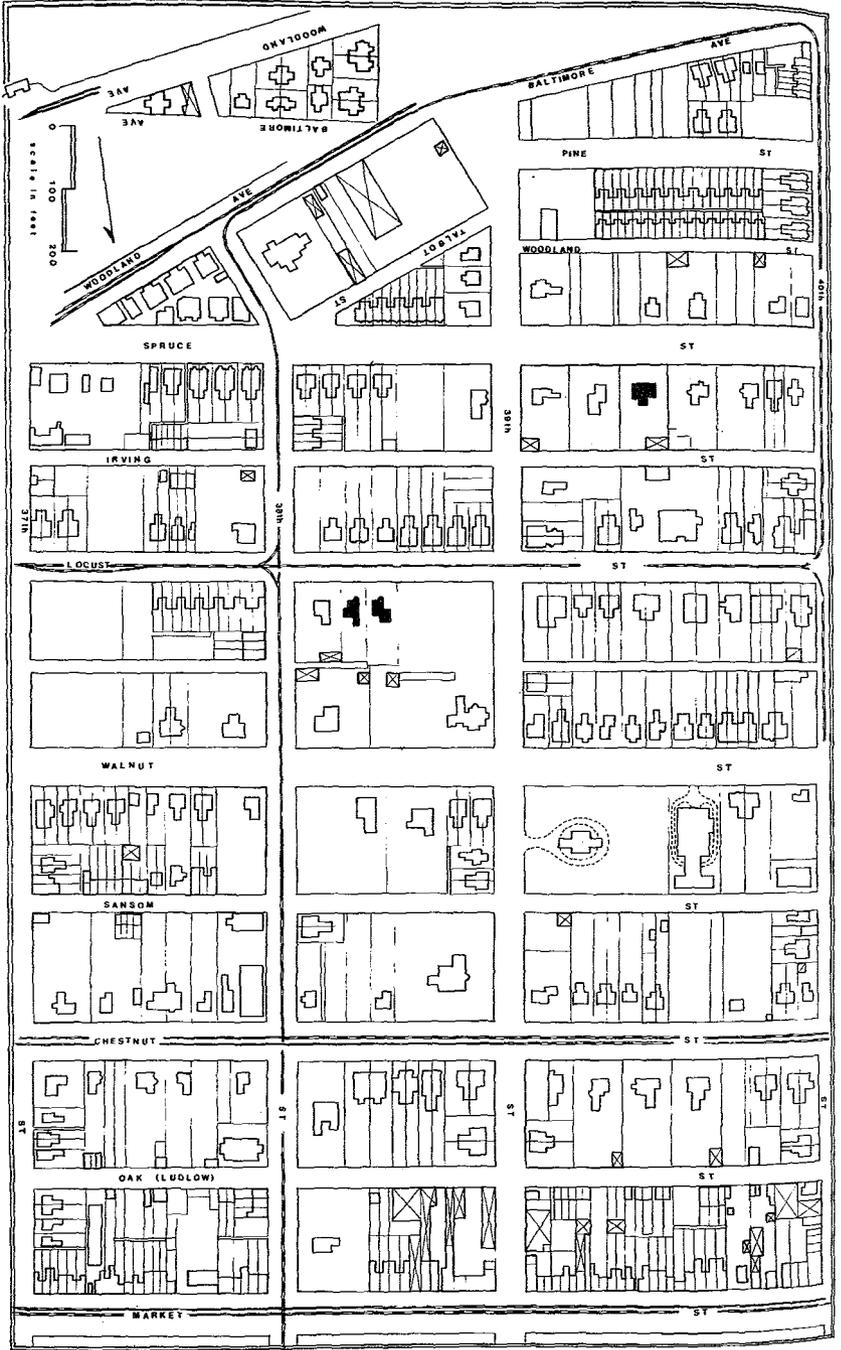
Adjacent to but largely separate from this group of locally employed artisans and workers were private estates of wealthy families. The largest post-colonial landowner in the area was William Hamilton whose immediate estate is now Woodlands Cemetery and whose original property included over six hundred acres between the Schuylkill and Mill Creek. Hamilton was the earliest developer of the land west of the river and south of Market Street. At the time of the construction of the first permanent bridge in 1804, he began to lay out the northeastern portion of his estate as a new settlement which came to be known as Hamiltonville. Hamilton planned the town as a continuation of the grid pattern of streets in the old city, from Filbert (then called Green) Street on the north to Woodland Avenue on the southeast, and from 32nd (Mansion) Street west to 41st (Till). Other north-south and east-west streets were named for members of Hamilton's family. In 1804 he published a map of the proposed development showing the blocks divided into lots of about a quarter acre each, with most fronting on the major east-west streets.¹⁶ Among these house-size lots were proposed sites for a church and public school. Hamilton thus anticipated that the new town would become a residential community south of the commercial center of Market Street.

Hamilton's plan for selling his land to speculative buyers, just as the area was being opened to the main city, set the pattern for later development within and west of the village. Those who first invested in the properties often bought large tracts as their private estates. Prior to 1850 most of the wealthy congregated along Chestnut and Walnut Streets near 38th and 39th. There they built mansions as country retreats and summer homes, some retaining townhouses in the city. These families lived and entertained graciously, one as host to President Andrew Jackson. It was their presence which first gave West Philadelphia the image of a fashionable suburb. Their large and elegant houses lent an aristocratic cachet to the area on which later commercial developers capitalized in building projects along neighboring streets.

15. U.S. Population Manuscript Census Schedule, 1850, West Philadelphia, pp. 1-64. Copies of manuscript census schedules cited are in possession of the Philadelphia Social History Project, University of Pennsylvania.

16. A copy of Hamilton's original map of 1804 is in possession of the Manuscript Department, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

PLATE 2. West Philadelphia. (J. D. Scott, *Atlas of West Philadelphia*, 1878.)



The early settlement of Hamilton Village thus included both working people and wealthy landowners who formed very different communities within the same area. The subsequent development of housing adjacent to Market Street depended on local economic activity, while that near the estates to the south and west relied on urbane residents' access to the business and society of the central city. These different residential communities grew largely apart from each other in the 1850s and 1860s. Groups of smaller rowhouses predominated east of 37th Street between Market and the large Blockley Alms House south of Darby Road. At the same time, blocks farther west between Market and the Woodlands became a neighborhood of more spacious single and attached houses. Later new housing projects of the late 1860s and the 1870s, when land in the area was increasingly scarce, included homes for wealthier commuters built within existing settlements of tradesmen and laborers. This study focuses on developments from 1850 to 1880 which were designed as residential retreats for those who worked in the city, and thus gave the area its suburban identity.

Between 1850 and 1860 West Philadelphia, which included all the territory of the present Philadelphia County west of the Schuylkill, more than doubled its population from 11,000 to 23,000.¹⁷ The town of Hamiltonville and the adjacent developments of Powelton and Mantua to the north were incorporated as the Borough of West Philadelphia in 1844, and became a District in 1851. The earliest governing bodies of the area, both the council of the borough and later the commissioners of the district, included prominent landowners in Hamiltonville who actively promoted local development. The commissioners presented this picture of the new district in 1852:

As a place of residence, it may be safely said that no other location in the vicinity of Philadelphia offers superior attractions. The ground in general is elevated and remarkably healthy; the streets are wide, and many of them, bordered with handsome shade trees; a large portion of the District has been covered with costly and highly ornamental dwellings. New streets are being opened, graded, and paved; footwalks have been laid and gas introduced, and arrangements will soon be made for an ample supply of water. Omnibus lines

17. Population figures for West Philadelphia, 1790-1850, 1860-1920, cited in William W. Weaver, *West Philadelphia: A Study of Natural Social Areas* (Philadelphia: Westbrook Co., 1931), pp. 42, 55.

have been established, which run constantly, day and evening, thus enabling residents to transact business in the City of Philadelphia and adjoining districts without inconvenience. A number of wealthy and influential citizens now reside in the District, and there is every indication that the tide of population will flow into it with unexampled rapidity.¹⁸

The ornate homes mentioned in the commissioners' description included those of doctors, lawyers, judges, and businessmen, built individually as private mansions. One of these still stands at 3905 Spruce Street, a three-story stone house built in 1850 by a lawyer, John C. Mitchell (Plate 2).¹⁹ The area just west of this site fronting on a major east-west street high above the river valley was formally known as West Hamiltonville, that extension of the town farthest from trade and industry and most intensively developed by early speculators. Mitchell, whose office was downtown on Walnut Street, also built a small stable and carriage house on his property. He evidently commuted to the city in his own equipage as did other nearby residents, such as the banker Anthony J. Drexel. Completely renovated in 1875, Mitchell's house was originally designed as an Italianate villa, as were later mansions along the block. Plate 3 shows a similar house, 3907 Spruce, now demolished. Builders of speculative projects on adjacent streets followed the architectural precedent of these early individual houses. They repeatedly adopted variations of this style to promote the image of West Philadelphia as a place, like the Italian country house, apart from the city, yet allied to an essentially urban culture.²⁰

In 1851, the year of the creation of the District of West Philadelphia, there began a developmental partnership which was to make a lasting imprint on the character of its growth as a suburb. Two investors, Samuel A. Harrison, a tile manufacturer, and Nathaniel B. Browne, a lawyer and local landowner, together began a series of building projects in and beyond southwestern Hamiltonville. The area west of 40th Street had until that time been woods and farmlands interspersed with several mansions along unpaved extensions

18. Commissioners of the District of West Philadelphia, *Digest of Ordinances* (Philadelphia, 1852), quoted in Joseph Jackson, *Market Street Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1918), pp. 196-197.

19. Philadelphia Historical Commission, File of Historically Certified Buildings, see file for 3905 Spruce Street (Joseph Potts House).

20. For a discussion of Italianate as a suburban style, see George S. Tatum, *Penn's Great Town* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), pp. 92-94.



PLATE 3. 3907 Spruce St., 1923. (University of Pennsylvania Archives.)

of village streets. Harrison and Browne fortuitously chose as their architect Samuel Sloan (1815–1884), later well known as a designer of public schools and asylums throughout the country.²¹ Sloan's first major success as an architect had been his design for Bartram Hall in West Philadelphia, a country house designed in 1850 for the wealthy railroad builder Charles Eastwick. Sloan's initial reputation was thus that of an architect of ornate residences for industrialists and financiers. Yet, in addition to individual mansions for designated owners, he was commissioned by Harrison and Browne to design groups of single and attached houses on several adjacent lots. Such new blocks were designed to attract groups of buyers who, though usually of humbler means than Sloan's earliest clients, had similar aspirations. Developers thus chose an architect already identified with the most expensive suburban houses in the area to design more versions in greater numbers for a newly-anticipated market.

Sloan's office executed more than twenty residences for Harrison and Browne in West Philadelphia between 1851 and 1856. Among the first were a set of eight attached houses along the 3900 block of Locust Street and a pair of single homes at 3803 and 3805 Locust (Plate 2). These last two buildings, designed in 1851, are the only part of the original project still standing. Harrison and Browne perhaps chose this section of Locust Street for their initial development because of its proximity to the wealthiest estates on nearby Walnut and Spruce Streets. The owners of these properties had controlled the vacant land between the main thoroughfares. The newly-developed tract on the corner of 38th Street was sold off by Henry Freeman, whose mansion stood on Walnut.²² Lots fronting on Locust, having been less valuable as a prestigious location for early manor houses, were thus opened to speculative building for the middle class.

The people whom Harrison and Browne foresaw as buyers for their more modest group of twins were more likely than surrounding residents to take advantage of the existing omnibus line. This ran from the railroad station at the foot of Market Street across the

21. For a complete account of Sloan's career, see Harold Norman Cooledge, Jr., "Samuel Sloan (1815–1884), Architect," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1963).

22. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, sale of property from Henry G. Freeman to Hugh McAlvain recorded in Deed Book G.W.C. 13, p. 420; sale of property from Hugh McAlvain to Nathaniel B. Browne, Deed Book G.W.C. 62, p. 221.



PLATE 4. 3803 Locust St. (Joseph Siny.)

Schuylkill into the old city at roughly 15 minute intervals through the day, and its last trip was back out to West Philadelphia in the late evening. Horse car lines replaced this omnibus line on Market Street in 1858, and later developments of attached houses along Locust Street above 36th were served directly by a horse car line which ran to the city over the Chestnut Street bridge completed in 1866. Housing built along this section of the street consisted almost exclusively of twins and rows prior to 1880, one of the clearest instances of a correlation between intensive suburban residential development and accessibility of transportation to the central city.

The two extant houses commissioned by Harrison and Browne are of brick finished with stucco, first advertised as "two mansions in the English pointed Gothic."²³ Their design grew out of Sloan's extensive repertoire of architectural elements, culled from a variety of styles, which he habitually adapted to his suburban houses. Both are asymmetrical in plan and picturesque in appearance with small entrance porches, wide bays, and steep overhanging roofs. Details include carved wooden brackets, patterned glass, and ornate iron-work lining the eaves, the last removed at a later date (Plate 4). In these houses Sloan was referring to a rural style of dwelling similar in its associations to the nearby Italianate villas. Both types evoke a contemporary popular image of the suburban home as a romantic retreat for the cultivated and successful.²⁴

The composition of these households on Locust Street was typical of later developments nearby. The easternmost house, 3803 Locust, was occupied by a succession of transient owners until Robert D. Work, a hat and cap merchant, bought the property in 1865 for \$5500. He and later his widow held the house for twenty-five years. Work maintained a store downtown at 51 North 3rd Street, moving to West Philadelphia from a home near Franklin Square on 4th Street above Callowhill.²⁵ He thus moved from a home less than a half mile from his workplace to a suburban address nearly four miles away. Work came to the suburb in the year his first child was born, when he was thirty-three. He presumably moved after his business was well established, as he bought the house without a

23. *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 1 May 1851, cited in Cooledge, op. cit., pp. 64, 74.

24. For a sense of the ideology behind such domestic architecture, see Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1851), esp. Section IX, "What a Country House or Villa Should Be", pp. 257-270.

25. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, Sale of property to Robert D. Work, Deed Book L.R.B. 116, p. 118; Work's home and business addresses listed in *McElroy's City Directory* (Philadelphia, 1861 and 1867).

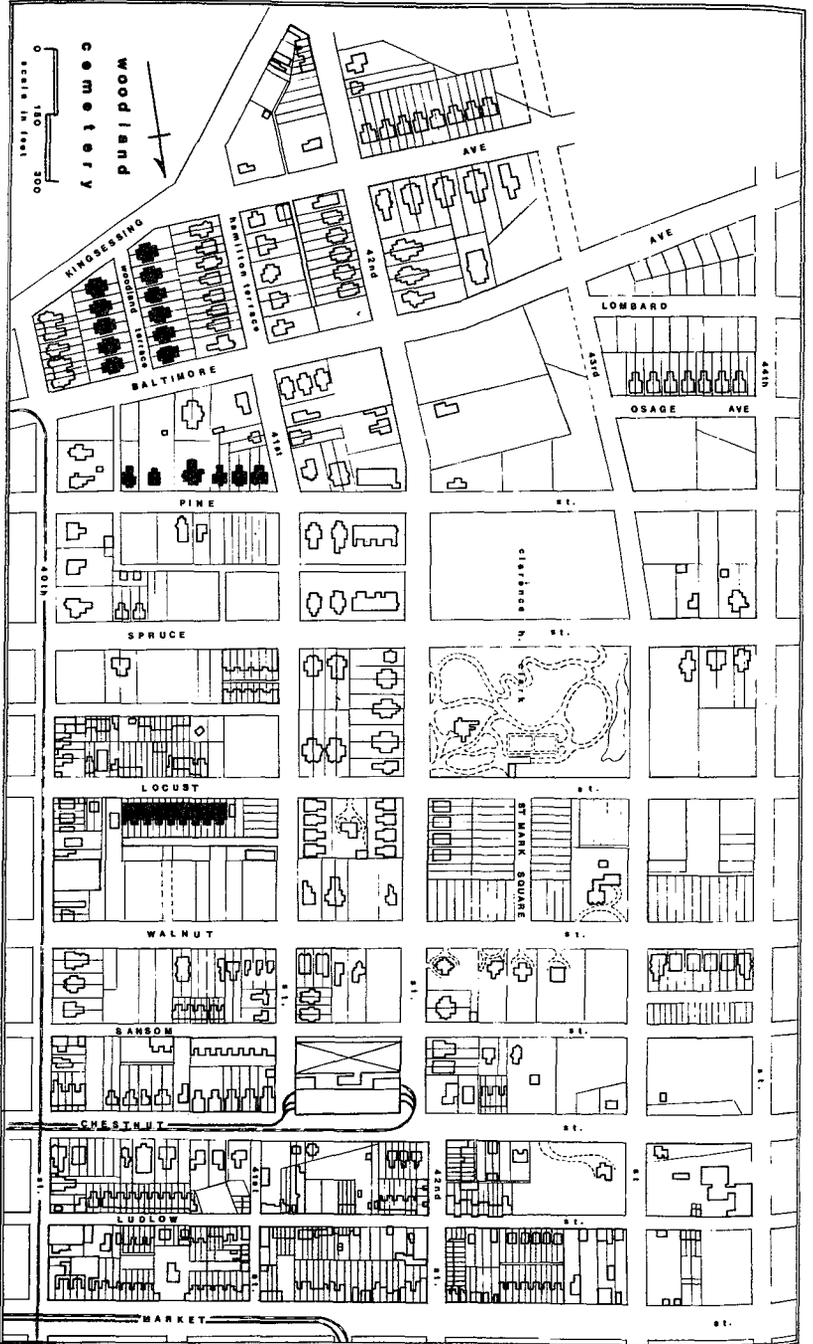
mortgage. The 1880 census indicates that Work's household included two servants and two boarders in addition to his wife and eldest son at school.²⁶ The typical household thus consisted of a commuting merchant, white and native born, whose wife kept house with the help of one or more servants, and whose older children were being educated, rather than at work in the family business. In-laws and other relatives were rare, while boarders, usually single men or women, were present in about one-fifth of these suburban households. Such nuclear families, usually moderately prosperous with business ties in the city, predominated throughout the area in these early decades of its growth as a suburb. Households such as Work's provided the market on which speculators depended in the years just before and after the Civil War.

One indication of the developers' estimation of the type of neighborhood they were creating was their decision to live in West Hamiltonville themselves. Both Harrison and Browne commissioned Sloan to design their own houses within the same blocks whose development they had planned and financed. They chose to reside at the opposite end of town from their work places in the old business district near the Delaware waterfront. This practice of developers moving into their own speculative housing, relatively uncommon today, prevailed throughout the older sections of West Philadelphia. Local landowners who chose not to sell and who sponsored residential construction on their private estates likewise continued to live in adjacent mansions. In this sense they followed William Hamilton's precedent, though they operated on a smaller scale and controlled land division and building more closely to increase returns on their investments.

Browne commissioned his own large house on Locust Street and a second residence on Spruce in 1851. Harrison likewise sited his mansion in the center of a block of five twins and single houses known as Hamilton Terrace. In 1856, he commissioned Sloan to design the entire west side of the street, an extension of 41st between Baltimore and Chester Avenues (Plate 5). The project marked the culmination of this early collaboration between developers and designer. Hamilton Terrace was carefully planned as a complete architectural composition. Picturesque single houses were located on each corner, Harrison's own house in the center, and two twins in-between. House type, color, and massing were alternated down the

26. U.S. Population Manuscript Census Schedule 1880, City of Philadelphia, Ward 27, District 580.

PLATE 5. West Philadelphia, 40th to 44th Streets. (J. D. Scott, *Atlas of West Philadelphia*, 1878.)



street, with each building given a stylistic tag. The corner houses were advertised as "Elizabethan cottages", the twins as "double villas in the classic manner", and Harrison's own centerpiece as "a Norman villa in stone".²⁷ The associative value of style thus remained very important to these early developers. They hired an architect to design an ornate and varied set of speculative houses and promoted them to potential buyers in the city as allusions to other worlds and other times. Harrison and Browne sought to attract sophisticated urban families with rustic, European, and above all pre-modern images of suburban life.

NEW STREETS FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS

The early work of Harrison, Browne and Sloan set the tone for much later development on the edge of old Hamiltonville. The panic of 1857 temporarily slowed the pace of building in West Philadelphia as elsewhere, but during the Civil War, land speculation and new construction continued to transform the area from country to suburb. Development on the outskirts of Hamiltonville was apparently greatest during the early war years, a trend consistent with the overall increase in dwelling construction throughout the city from 1861 to 1863.²⁸ The new suburban homes built west of 40th Street in this period were notably innovative in adapting techniques of planning and design found in pre-war projects.

One of the more enterprising developers in the area during and after the Civil War was Charles M. S. Leslie, a conveyancer and real estate agent. In 1861 Leslie initiated the development of Woodland Terrace, one of the most extensive single projects of this period still standing. Woodland Terrace is a block of ten attached houses parallel to and east of Hamilton Terrace, between Baltimore and Woodland Avenues (Plate 5). Their design is attributed to Sloan, whose office was located several doors from Leslie's on South 4th Street. What is remarkable about this street is the degree of unity sought by developer and architect. They exercised close control over the planning of the site and the appearance and sale of the houses, evidently anticipating a group of residents much alike in wealth, family size, and aspirations. The early history of the block's

27. *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 3 August 1854; 30 July 1856, cited in Cooledge, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

28. Philadelphia Board of Trade, 37th Annual Report, Philadelphia 1870, pp. 52-53.

occupancy confirmed their expectation as to the common characteristics of many of those moving from the suburb.

Leslie began work on the project in 1857, assembling the land through two purchases, and gaining passage of an act by the State General Assembly which closed an old branch of 40th Street which ran diagonally through the property, northeast to southwest. He then laid out Woodland Terrace as a new public street at his own expense and divided the adjoining property into twenty-two house lots together valued at \$70,000 in 1861. He also planned secondary streets running parallel to Woodland Terrace behind the properties as alleys for private stables and carriage houses built by individual residents.²⁹ Leslie planned the street as the first of three adjacent developments. He later built a smaller group of six twins on the no longer extant Fountain Terrace which ran parallel to and east of Woodland Terrace, and a set of five attached houses across the street from the original Hamilton Terrace. A horse car line was established in December 1858 which ran from 49th Street and Woodland Avenue to outlying Darby. The later connecting line which ran along Woodland Avenue to the central city served all three of these terraces directly.

Leslie was careful to protect his investment in Woodland Terrace as a future residential street. In a temporary sale of the property to another holder prior to the construction of the houses, he inserted a covenant "that no slaughterhouse, skin dressing house or engine house, blacksmith shop or carpenter shop, glue, soap, candle or starch manufactory or any other for offensive occupation be erected" on the site.³⁰ Such a restriction against nuisance industries apparently took the place of a zoning law protecting the area against non-residential development, which was then encroaching along the eastern section of Woodland Avenue. The houses on Woodland Terrace were built between April 1861 and June 1862. After the first phase of construction some lots with unfinished houses were sold to tradesmen such as carpenters, plasterers, or stair builders who retained title to the property while they did their work, selling back to the supervising builder when finished.³¹ This was a common practice in the building trades at that time in West Philadelphia. A skilled worker's temporary ownership of a house perhaps served

29. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, Deed Book ACH 14, p. 36.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Philadelphia Historical Commission, File of Historically Certified Buildings, files on 501-520 Woodland Terrace.

as a kind of lien, providing security against any default on payment by the general contractor or developer for whom he was working.³² In addition to providing the sub-contractor with a lien-equivalent, the transfer of title may have passed to the sub-contractor the burden of financing a portion of the development. For cash-poor developers in a period of short-term, high interest loans, the arrangement possibly provided a mechanism for obtaining what were essentially interest-free, secured loans.³³

Aside from those incomplete houses sold to craftsmen, Leslie sold five to individual buyers for an average price of \$6100. Those for which he could not find single owners after two years he sold in groups of three or four to intermediary buyers such as merchants and manufacturers, usually for about \$2000 less than his early sales. These buyers either resold or rented individual houses to their first occupants.³⁴ Leslie's large initial risk on the entire development was thus divided among a second set of smaller investors who gambled on its eventual popularity. These secondary purchasers usually chose to retain title and rent or lease the houses to others, so that by 1870 only two families on Woodland Terrace owned their own homes. This high proportion of sales to non-residents, none of whom financed their purchase with a mortgage, indicates a strong interest in suburban houses as profitable investments among those with capital apart from the original developer. Leslie found wealthy buyers who were willing to take a chance on Woodland Terrace even after he had failed to sell houses to individual owners at higher prices.

Although Woodland Terrace is a set of twenty attached houses, each twin was made to look like a single mansion. The designer carefully obscured their two separate entrances, setting the doorways far back from the street on the sides of the houses in the shadow of a deep porch which wraps around the entire first floor of each building. This single porch, even spacing of windows across the facade, a continuous string course of stone around the upper story, and a roof with a single ornamental pitch in the center, together transform a block of shared, and thus less prestigious, houses into

32. This explanation of the financial arrangement was suggested to us by George Thomas and Carl Doebly.

33. We are indebted to Jay Feinman for this suggested explanation.

34. Philadelphia Historical Commission, File of Historically Certified Buildings, files on 501-520 Woodland Terrace.

what appears from the street to be a set of large, three-story Italianate villas (Plate 6). On the corner twins on either side of the block, the massing of the houses along Baltimore and Woodland Avenues is altered so that a single tower on one side appears to belong to the whole structure, furthering the illusion of a single family as owner of each corner property. The success of these efforts to make successive twins appear as singles gives the street as a whole a special attraction. The designer's attempt to lend a nobler air to Woodland Terrace effectively conveys an image of wealth and charm associated with suburban life, and was imitated by later builders in the neighborhood.

The unified architectural effect of the street corresponds to the extraordinary sameness of the families who moved in during the 1860s. Of the fourteen households surveyed in the 1870 census, nine were headed by merchants who had stores or wholesale offices downtown. These commuting residents were all between the ages of thirty and fifty, all married, with an average of three children, and all but one had servants. Four families listed ownership of real property over \$7000, while all but one of the households which claimed no estate, had boarders to supplement income. All of the families were white, and all heads of household were born in the United States.³⁵

The pattern is generally similar in 1880, after a decade of depression and recovery. Only two families had retained their homes since 1870, and the proportion of merchants had dropped to less than a third. Yet all but one male head of household was still in business or the professions, working in law, real estate, insurance, or at the stock exchange. Most had been rich enough to educate their children, with those over twenty-one and living at home including engineers, a lawyer, and an artist. All heads were white, older, with an average age of 51, and all but one were native born.³⁶

One revealing trend in the early history of Woodland Terrace is the number of widows raising families. Such households comprised more than a fourth of the total in 1870 and 1880. These women were among the wealthier heads of household, all claiming real property in 1870. Their eldest sons worked to support younger siblings, sometimes together with families of their own.³⁷ This propor-

35. U.S. Population Manuscript Census Schedule, 1870, City of Philadelphia, Ward 27, District 2; *McElroy's City Directory* (Philadelphia, 1870 and 1871).

36. U.S. Population Manuscript Census Schedule, 1880, City of Philadelphia, Ward 27, District 572; *McElroy's City Directory* (Philadelphia, 1880 and 1881).

37. *Ibid.*



PLATE 6. Woodland Terrace. (Joseph Stry.)

tion of both younger and older widowed families fits the character of the street as a quiescent suburban retreat where a mother, with the help of servants and older children, could best manage a household alone. The sense of stability and refuge which such families probably sought in a place like Woodland Terrace was the outcome of the combined efforts of its developer, architect, and later owners which had encouraged the presence of so many similar middle-class households. The initial plan for the street and those adjacent to it, the presence of a number of secondary investors, and the care given to its design all helped to determine its pattern of residence. The similarity of its occupants is remarkable precisely because it is what one would expect as the result of such a controlled development.

Not all blocks were developed so completely and uniformly as Woodland Terrace. Most housing constructed west of 40th Street during the Civil War involved a smaller initial outlay of capital and control of less land. Throughout the area developers continued the early pattern of plot division and house types, often combining single and attached units, along the major east-west streets. Builders likewise chose to follow stylistic models of the early houses within Hamiltonville, adopting variations of Italianate and other schemes of detailing which had come to represent life outside the city. Those who moved into the neighborhood during this period resembled the households of Sloan's developments of the 1850s, though as a group they appear more affluent, including heads of large businesses and professionals with their own practice or partnership. Development, architecture, and residence thus continued to reinforce the image of the area as a country retreat for the urban well-to-do.

One of the new blocks which came into being as a sequence of several small projects was the south side of 4000 Pine Street (Plate 5). The story of this group is one of successive developers attempting to build in conformity with the prestigious image of the street established by the earliest houses. Like most of the major east-west thoroughfares of West Philadelphia, Pine was a continuation of one of the important residential streets of the colonial city. In Hamilton's original survey it continued west of the Schuylkill beyond the Alms House property, extending from 39th at its juncture with Baltimore Avenue to 41st Street. These few blocks were very sparsely settled in 1850, providing open sites for new development at the southwestern tip of the old town. Among the first houses on the street were two Italianate villas, 4000 and 4002 Pine, built in 1854 and 1856 respectively. These were three-story, white stuccoed



PLATE 7. 4004-4006 Pine St. (*Joseph Siry.*)

private houses with a lot frontage about three times that of a single property on Woodland Terrace. The longtime resident of the corner mansion was Benjamin Knight, a railroad president whose family held the house until 1910. His neighbor at 4002 Pine, Edward C. Warne, a wholesale jeweler, had also invested in four houses on Woodland Terrace. Each of these original houses on the block had sold for over \$10,000.³⁸

The second developer on the street was a downtown lawyer, John C. Mitchell, who planned three twins on the west end of the block, 4009–4018 Pine. His builder, James Shaw, disguised these attached houses after the manner of Woodland Terrace, using a variety of devices such as towers, porches, roof pitches, and large bays to make two look like one. As a group they are particularly convincing in their effect, looking as elegant as the real singles which had set the tone for the block. The final house, in the center of the block, was a fourth twin built in 1864 by Edwin Rafsnyder, a contractor who was responsible for several others in the area including one directly behind on Baltimore Avenue. This central lot, then flanked by houses on both sides, was half of a larger plot sold by the banker Clarence Clark for over \$12,000, or more than twice the combined prices of the adjacent properties for 4000 and 4002, which had been sold off by the merchant Francis Knorr ten years before.³⁹ Perhaps compelled by the design of the adjacent houses, Rafsnyder built 4004–4006 to appear as a single Italianate brownstone, with one large tower projecting from the center into which dual entrances disappeared (Plate 7).

In 1870 all but two of the occupants of these ornate twins owned their own homes. Most of these new owners had acquired title by paying the set price of the houses without relying on financing through a mortgage. While ethnicity, family composition, and numbers of servants resembled the households of Woodland Terrace, none of the men on Pine Street were involved in retail commerce. Heads of families were exclusively educated professionals such as clergymen and lawyers, wholesalers, or financial agents and brokers. Over half of those families who had invested \$8000 or more in the new houses relocated at least once between 1870 and 1880.⁴⁰ Yet

38. Philadelphia Historical Commission, File of Historically Certified Buildings, files on 4000–4018 Pine Street.

39. *Ibid.*

40. U.S. Population Manuscript Census Schedules, 1870, City of Philadelphia, Ward 27, District 1; 1880, Ward 27, District 527; *McElroy's City Directory* (Philadelphia, 1870, 1871, 1880, and 1881).

almost all of those who did move out found new homes within four blocks of Pine Street. The story was similar for those leasing families who moved away from Woodland Terrace, all of whom found another home within the same neighborhood rather than moving back to the central city or to another suburb. Such a mobile group of residents entailed some risk for those owners who rented or leased these houses, as well as for those who planned future projects nearby. Yet, given the pattern of relocation, the area as a whole retained a demand for housing high enough to sustain dense development throughout the 1870s.

THE EXTENSION OF URBAN PATTERNS

Apart from the spacious, ornate houses built beyond 40th Street, other speculative projects brought more urban patterns of land division, architecture, and residence to West Philadelphia after the Civil War. In the late 1860s large-scale building activity began in the eastern section of old Hamiltonville below the early estate district. Although developments of this period were not the first in the area, they were markedly larger, demanding greater initial investment and more comprehensive planning of entire street fronts and blocks. With potentially higher rates of return or loss involved, financial risk was often shared by landowners and builders, the latter sometimes being made responsible for marketing as well as construction. The new projects included rowhouses and rows of identical twins built along busy streets, rather than more individuated houses sited apart from traffic as on Woodland Terrace. As speculative practice and building density changed, so did the characteristics of those who inhabited the new houses. New residents of this part of West Philadelphia were less exclusively wealthy and native born, though the new developments continued primarily to accommodate heads of household who worked in the central city rather than those who were dependent on the local economy. The old town of Hamiltonville, though increasingly urban in density, appearance, and population characteristics, continued to serve as a residential extension of the main city, retaining its identity, at least in the eyes of developers, as the suburb of West Philadelphia.

One of the most active developers within Hamiltonville after the Civil War was Annesley R. Govett, a lumber merchant whose own large house stood on the southeast corner of 36th and Walnut Streets. Between 1868 and 1878, Govett undertook three major

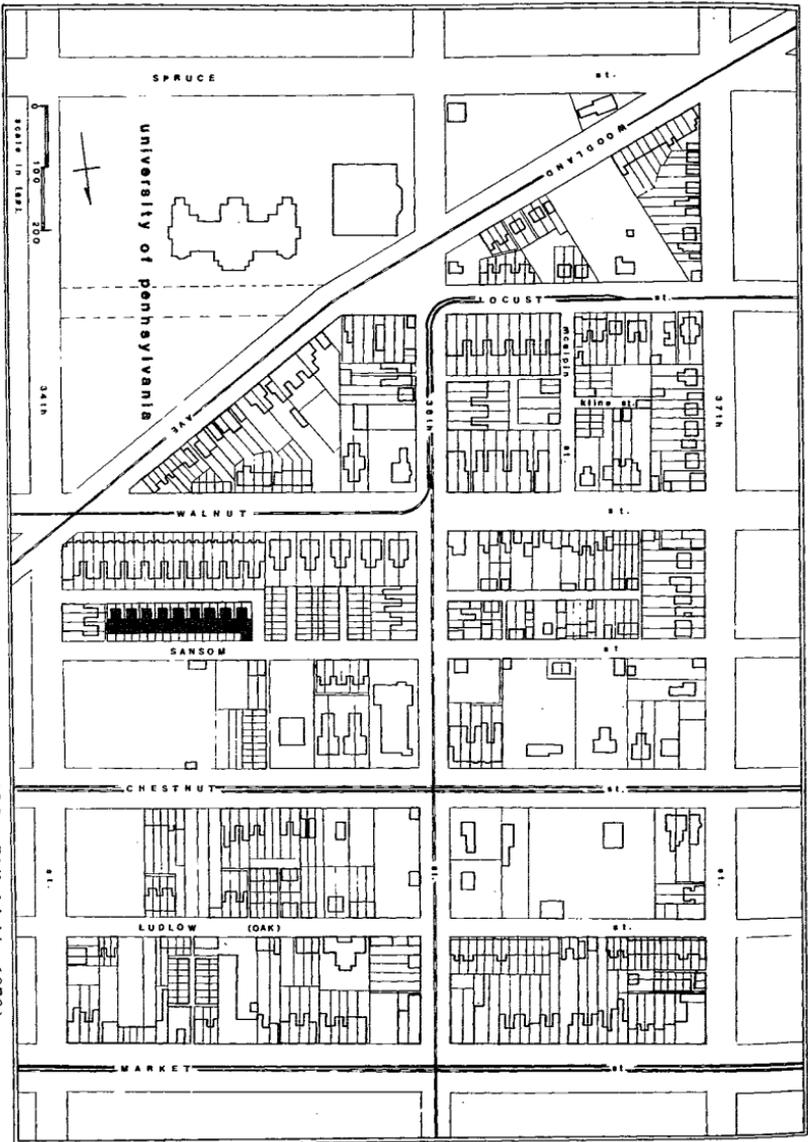


PLATE 8. West Philadelphia, 34th to 37th Streets. (J. D. Scott, *Atlas of West Philadelphia*, 1878.)

housing projects below 40th Street. He planned an entire square block of new construction between Walnut and Sansom, and 34th and 36th Streets (Plate 8); one block front along Spruce Street between 37th and 38th; and another complete block between Pine and Woodland, and 39th and 40th Streets (Plate 2). What is particularly significant in these projects is Govett's careful segregation of house types according to the relative importance of the streets on which they faced. In each development he sited large brownstone twins and rows on the most prominent streets, usually those with horse car lines, such as Walnut and 40th Street. On interstitial streets such as Sansom and Woodland, he built rowhouses similar in plan though smaller than those on the major thoroughfares. Finally, he built still smaller rows on narrow alleys, with houses usually no more than twelve feet wide and twenty feet deep with a small rear yard. Such housing for laborers and service workers once stood along two alleys, Chestnut Place and Walnut Place, which ran south off Sansom Street below 36th, and no longer exist. Govett thus developed plots in West Philadelphia as urban sites where different house types were located to maximize density and profitability, concentrating richer and poorer within a single block.

Govett bought most of the tract between Walnut and Sansom Streets in 1866 from the estate of one of the original purchasers of William Hamilton's lands. He then sold off sections of the block to builders in parcels of many small lots, whose size and configuration dictated the type of houses to be built. The conditions of sale also included restrictive covenants as to setback of houses from the street, and mortgages attached to each lot binding the builder to find buyers to avoid foreclosure. Govett negotiated such a sale with the builder William Ambler in 1869 for the construction of the row 3402-3436 Sansom Street, the only part of the original project still standing. Ambler then sold the plots, with mortgages and covenants attached, to a second builder, Walter Mole, who constructed the houses and began their sale to individual owners in 1870.⁴¹ Through such arrangements Govett passed on some of the financial risk of the development to contractors, while retaining ultimate control of the properties should they fail to sell them to landlords or owner-occupants.

41. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, Govett's original purchase in Deed Book L.R.B. 220, p. 379; sale of property from Govett to Ambler in Deed Book J.T.O. 229, p. 162; sale of property from Ambler to Mole in Deed Book J.T.O. 286, p. 325.

The story of this row on Sansom Street indicates both speculative pressure on land prices and a different source of demand for suburban housing in West Philadelphia around 1870. The mortgages on each individual lot totalled \$3800, or \$600 more than the average price of the much larger lots on Woodland Terrace ten years before.⁴² The architectural devices used to enhance the attraction of the row reveal the builder's intention to provide more modest housing than the earliest developments farther west, yet with more amenities than the small closed rows which then predominated along other secondary streets near Market. As in the larger row-houses on Walnut Street, the L-plan of those behind on Sansom allowed light to reach one side wall in the rear. Bay windows in the rear, a shingled mansard third story above brownstone facing on the front, arched doorways, tiny gardens, and iron railings were all included as modest selling points (Plate 9). Just as earlier developers enhanced the appearance of twins to make them resemble singles, so the setback and facade helped to dissociate Sansom Street from the plain brick urban row which it really was both in plan and construction. It was this artful detail which saved the block in recent years, the design earning recognition in the National Register of Historic Places and thereby forestalling possible demolition.⁴³ The builder evidently took care to set this group of larger, more attractive houses apart from the smallest rows up the street. In 1869 the city extended water lines along Sansom Street from 34th to 35th, stopping short of the poorest housing on Chestnut and Walnut Place. The two westernmost houses on Sansom also project out to the sidewalk, thus helping to cut off the view of the alleys to the west and further separating one class of housing from another.

The families who first settled on Sansom Street shared the same claim to a suburban identity as those living in larger houses of other developments. Over half of the fifteen heads of household surveyed in 1880 worked at addresses in the central city, most as bookkeepers and salesmen, and some as clerks and minor public officials. While these men followed a daily commuting routine similar to the lawyers and businessmen living elsewhere in the area, the residents of these new rowhouses were more varied in their backgrounds

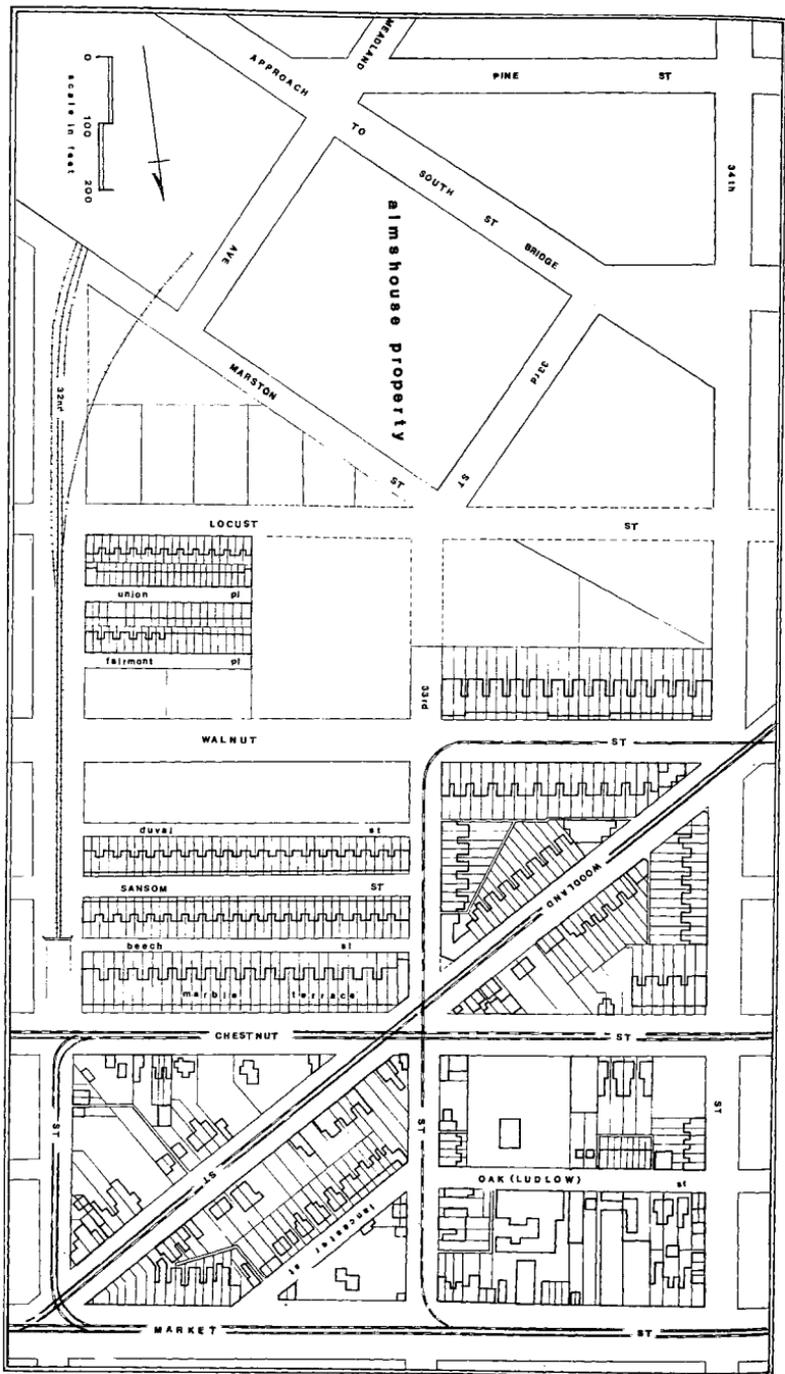
42. Philadelphia Historical Commission, File of Historically Certified Buildings, files on 501-520 Woodland Terrace.

43. U.S. Department of Interior, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, National Register of Historic Places, Annual Listing of Historic Properties, *Federal Register*, vol. 43, no. 26, Tuesday, February 7, 1978, Washington, D.C.



PLATE 9. 3400 Block of Sansom St. (Joseph Siny.)

PLATE 10. West Philadelphia, 32nd to 34th Streets. (J. D. Scott, *Atlas of West Philadelphia, 1878*.)



than those in wealthier housing nearby. Two-thirds of the heads of household were born out of the country or were of foreign stock. All of those who were themselves immigrants had come from Ireland. Families included an average of three children, and nine of fifteen households had servants. One senses that these people were struggling harder with life than earlier suburban residents. Teenage children were less often at school and more likely to be working in nonprofessional jobs to supplement family income. Although the proportion of households with boarders was the same as that of Woodland Terrace (one out of five), two of the three families which did sublet did so to other families, and not to single men or women. One household reported unemployment, another cancer, and a third widowed family had a daughter running a grocery in addition to sons at work.⁴⁴ Thus, although most of the Sansom residents worked downtown, they had little else in common with other suburban families whose housing represented a more complete escape from urban patterns. These first occupants of denser developments had managed to move to new homes across the river, yet they had different occupations, origins, and circumstances than those who had come earlier.

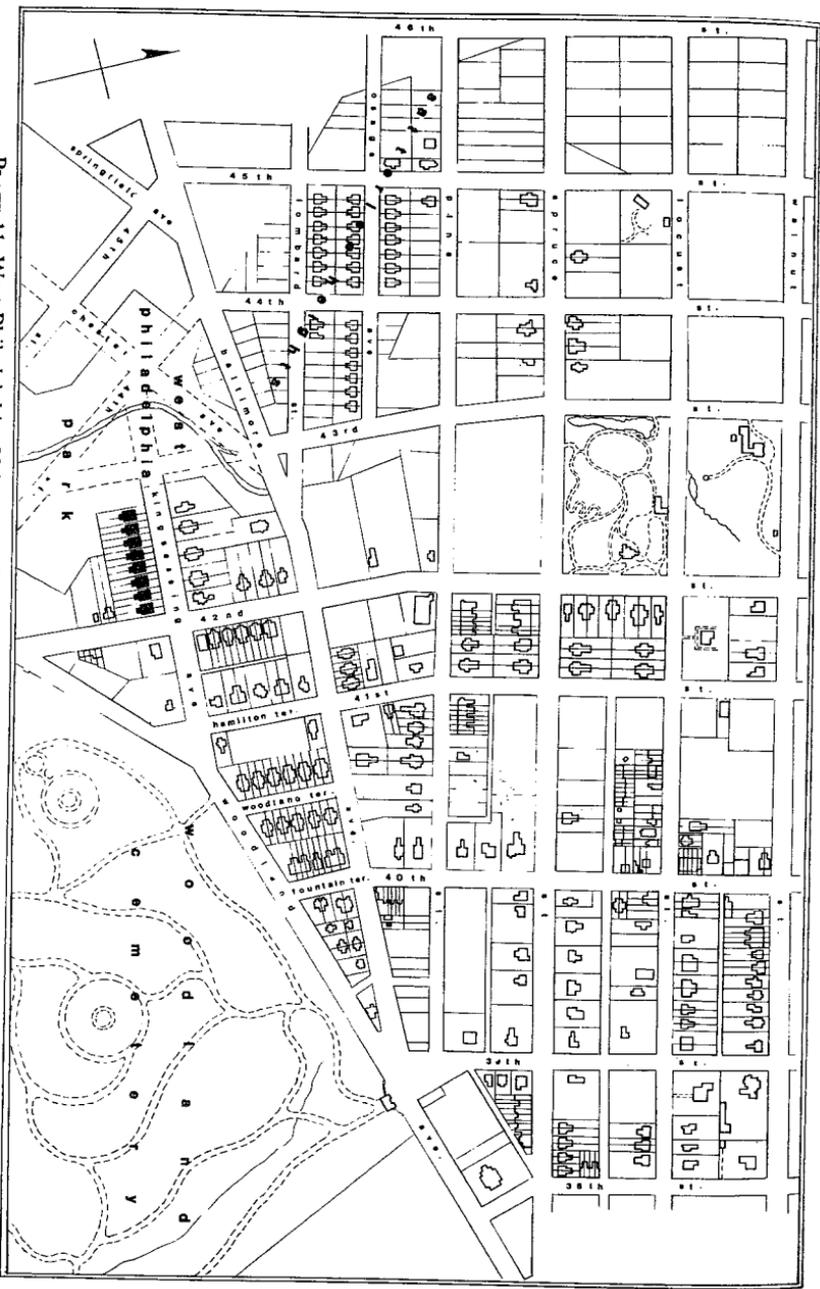
Complete blocks of rowhouses similar to Govett's projects were built nearby in the eastern end of West Philadelphia between the end of Civil War and the panic of 1873, both for upper and lower middle-class residents. Large brownstone rows like those across the Schuylkill near Rittenhouse Square, were built along Chestnut and Walnut Streets below 34th (Plate 10). Smaller groups appeared on Locust and Spruce farther west near 37th and 38th Streets, (Plate 2), in addition to new laborers' rows along Ludlow and Sansom Streets behind the commercial corridor of Market Street (Plate 8).

SPECULATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 1870s

The proliferation of large, dense housing developments in the old village area occurred at the same time as the first of many speculative booms west of 42nd Street, beyond the earlier work of Sloan and others. Around 1870 there began a series of major projects in this outlying area, usually blocks of attached houses similar in planning and architecture to Woodland Terrace, though often not as ornate nor as carefully designed. Between 1870 and 1880 the

44. U.S. Population Manuscript Census Schedule, 1880, City of Philadelphia, Ward 27, District 583; *McElroy's City Directory* (Philadelphia, 1880 and 1881).

PLATE 11. West Philadelphia, 38th to 46th Streets. (G. M. Hopkins, *Atlas of West Philadelphia, 1872.*)



street grid of the town was extended over large open tracts which were then part of several private estates. The owners of these properties, who lived in elegant mansions in the area, usually sold parcels to developers who divided the land into house plots and sponsored construction. Some landowners undertook projects themselves, retaining title and controlling the type of development which took place. The process of suburban expansion in this new territory resembled the early evolution of Hamiltonville itself: the extension of the street grid of the old city over country estates, the sale of blocks or plot groups to smaller landowners, and final subdivision into house lots for building. In its repetition of plans and motifs, the newer speculative housing further west of the early town prefigures a common design practice of modern suburban development. Most of these groups still stand, and together with later work, they comprise much of residential West Philadelphia as we know it today.

Large projects encompassing several block fronts were underway on Lombard Street and Osage Avenue between 43rd and 45th, sited beyond more densely occupied areas and existing horse car lines along 40th Street and Woodland Avenue (Plate 11). Such development demanded an extensive outlay of capital for buying the land, clearing it of debt, and sponsoring construction. Yet speculators were nevertheless willing to assume the risk for the successful marketing of their blocks. They entered into simple contractual agreements with builders, who both planned and constructed the houses, gaining temporary title to the land while they worked. Builders then sold back the finished development to the speculator without becoming responsible for its eventual sale to buyers through binding mortgage agreements. These projects in the area called Satterlee Heights were simple rows of almost identical attached houses rather than careful compositions of varied types and styles such as Sloan's plan for Hamilton Terrace. Developers' willingness to build beyond established neighborhoods, assume sole responsibility for the fate of large projects, and to trade architectural variation for greater numbers of houses, all imply high expectations of a demand large enough to insure relatively quick and complete occupancy. They relied for success in these projects of the early 1870s both on proximity of existing streets which had given the whole area its prestigious suburban identity, and on the promise of further development which would fill out the surrounding blocks to create a complete neighborhood.

One of the first of these new developments was on the south side of the 4200 block of Chester Avenue, then Kingsessing Avenue (Plate 11). Sixteen attached houses were built in 1871 along the sloping site across the street from older, much larger twins and singles which had been among the first west of 42nd Street. William Jenks, a merchant, assembled the tract through purchases from an absentee owner, Robert Lindsay, who had divided the land into speculative lots. Lindsay had waived the option to build in exchange for ground rents on these lots from the new developer. Jenks sold the land in 1870 to a builder, Thomas Clark, who redivided the property into smaller lots and constructed eight brownstone-faced twins, identically detailed and equally spaced in one row down the street.⁴⁵ Part of the block still stands as built, the houses set back from the sidewalk some twenty-five feet to provide generous fenced front yards. The attached houses appear as modest singles, sharing a common front porch, large arched windows on the second story, a mansard facing above, and decorative ironwork along the roof (Plate 12). The new twins thus offered residents a more compact version of those architectural features clearly identifiable as suburban. Clark produced a set of new homes identical in layout and motifs, similar in conception to the projects of modern corporate builders who rely on a limited choice of plans and detailing to appeal to buyers. Like many contemporary developments, this group of twins built over a century ago represents a minimal adaptation of a larger, more ornate house type. The studied parsimony of today's speculative suburban projects has at least one precedent in these early extensions of West Philadelphia.

Jenks sold these houses, located on a major commuting route to the city, for about \$5000 each. Those living on the block in 1880 resemble other suburban residents in occupation, family history, and household composition. Retailers, lawyers, and clergymen, all but one native born, lived with their wives and an average of two children. All eleven households had servants while three included boarders. As a group these families appear less affluent than residents of older, more gracious developments nearby. Only three heads of household listed a business address, and none were wholesalers or involved in a professional partnership. What is detectable

45. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, sale of property from Robert Lindsay to William Jenks in Deed Book J.T.O. 271, pp. 439, 443, 447, 452, 460, 464, 468, 473, 477, 482; sale of property from Jenks to Clark in Deed Book J.A.H. 69, p. 361.

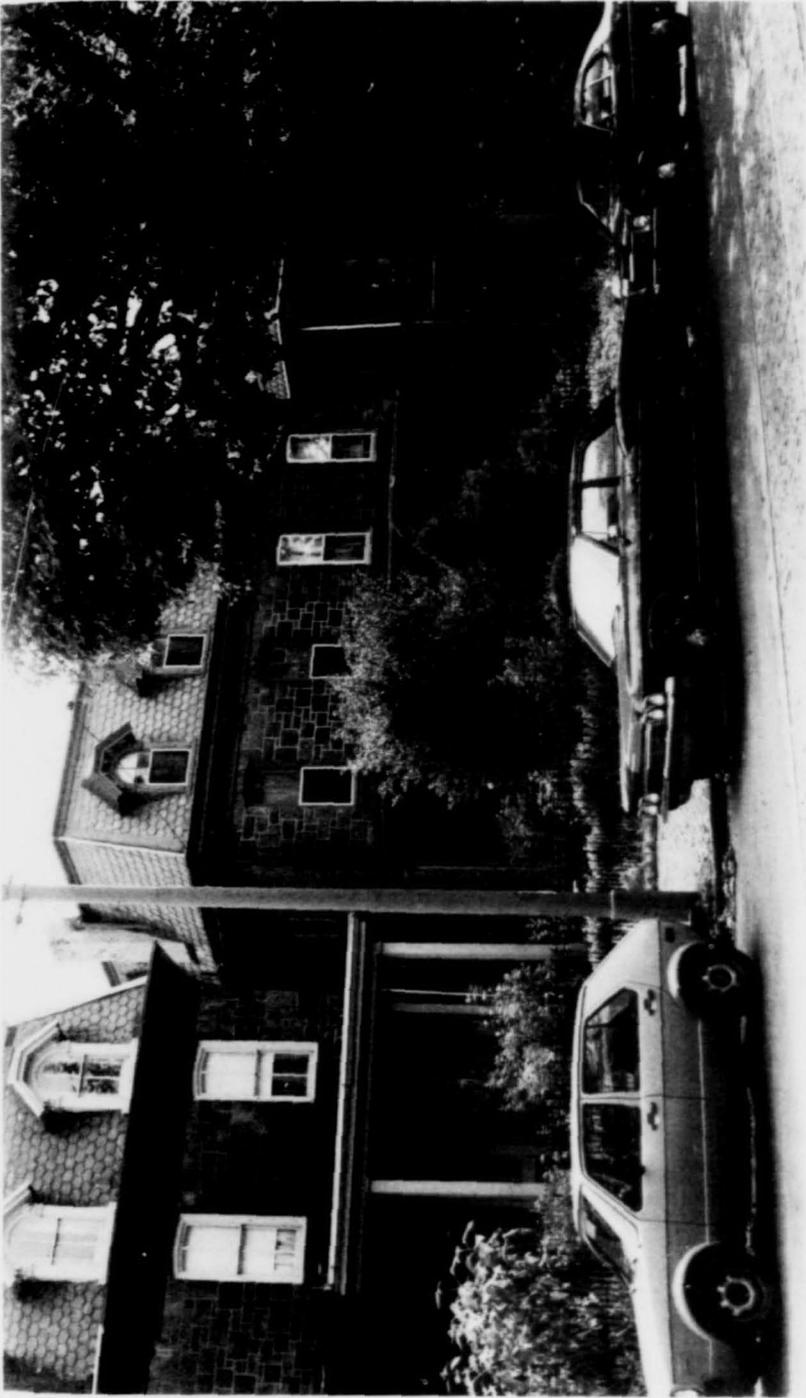


PLATE 12. 4200 Block of Chester Avenue. (*Joseph Siry.*)

in this set of owner-occupants is their high rate of mobility. Properties along the street changed hands about once every three years during the 1870s, the average tenure being slightly longer than that for the smaller houses on Sansom Street which were first occupied at about the same time. One-third of the families on Chester Avenue in 1880 listed new home addresses within a year of the census.⁴⁶

General economic conditions during the mid-1870s probably influenced both the transience of these later suburban households and a simultaneous lull in development west of 42nd Street. Both construction and individual decisions to move into the new housing were speculative ventures affected by the severe swings in the city's economy from 1873 to 1877. The circumstances of the less wealthy fluctuated enough to cause them to move frequently in a decade of alternating growth and panic. Similarly in this time of uncertain financing and demand, few new blocks of attached houses appeared in the western extension of the suburb where several developers had speculated heavily in the years just before depression. The plainer, repetitive suburban houses built early in this period are likewise more clearly identifiable as speculative projects for the middle class. Greater economy of design had begun to appear in a neighborhood with earlier architecture of aristocratic pretensions.

At the same time as development farther west of old Hamiltonville slowed in the mid-seventies, smaller, denser housing projects were begun in new areas within the early settlement. Blocks of rowhouses appeared for the first time west of the wealthier district near 40th Street. In a period when expansive projects in open areas were rare, smaller remaining sites within established neighborhoods were exploited to provide more dwelling units and thus a higher rate of return on a developer's initial investment. The pattern of residence fostered by these more explicitly urban schemes of development came to resemble that of the central city where block fronts of rich and poor were more likely to be near one another than in suburban West Philadelphia. The new groups of rowhouses in the area brought together commuting heads of household and earlier residents of the same streets who were dependent on local economic life. Such speculative housing built prior to 1880 continued to attract families whose heads worked downtown, yet these households were no longer set as clearly apart from non-suburban residents as they had been since 1850.

46. U.S. Population Manuscript Census Schedule, 1880, City of Philadelphia, Ward 27, District 572; *McElroy's City Directory* (Philadelphia, 1880 and 1881).

Rowhouses for wealthier commuters were built along the interstitial east-west streets from Market to Spruce between 40th and 41st (Plate 5). Such concentrated development grew in contrast to those groups of attached houses which proliferated south of Spruce away from the commercial center of the area. This variation of house type with smaller rows near Market and larger twins farther away continued the pattern of settlement in early Hamiltonville when tradesmens' homes clustered nearer the main street and wealthy estates were more common farther south. Yet attempts of the 1870s to build denser suburban housing near 40th Street departed from the old norm by imposing more prestigious development onto poorer streets which had largely been passed over by earlier speculators. The existing neighborhood north of the horse car line along 40th Street included small rows on Ludlow, Sansom, Locust, and Irving Streets that housed laborers, service workers, and local shopkeepers. These choices of location and density for speculative housing, which called for new architectural solutions to enhance the block front, began to transform the image of the suburb from that of a quiet country retreat into that of an urban neighborhood.

The man responsible for much later development in this area was Clarence H. Clark, a partner in the well-known banking house of E. H. Clark & Co., which his father had established in 1837. He lived on a private estate between Locust and Spruce, and 42nd and 43rd Streets, later the site of the Divinity School of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. During the 1870s, Clark profited both by gradually selling off sections of his large holdings and by developing some of the property himself. One of his projects which still stands is a group of seventeen rowhouses just above 40th Street, 4013-4045 Locust Street (Plate 5). In June of 1875 he sold what had previously been a single tract as a set of narrow lots to the builder John McCloskey for \$85,000. McCloskey agreed to deliver a mortgage to Clark of \$5000 on each house, or \$85,000 on the entire property. The entire plot was only slightly larger than that on the corner of 38th and Locust for which Harrison and Browne had paid a total of \$5250 twenty-five years before.⁴⁷

Clark controlled the progress of the development by agreeing to advance directly to McCloskey about two-thirds of the sale price, and to give him the last third in the form of advances to be paid as

47. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, sale of property from Clarence Clark to John McCloskey, in Deed Book F.T.W. 204, p. 337.

successive stages of the building were completed. McCloskey received \$200 on each house when the cellar was dug and the first floor joists laid, \$200 more when the second floor joists were laid, and so on, with the full balance paid when each house was completed and ready for occupancy. The builder was thus bound to finish the houses to earn advances to pay his mortgage debt. He did, however, retain title to the land during construction as a lien against default on payment for his finished work. Clark likewise protected his own investment by being able to recover the property should McCloskey not finish the building and therefore not earn the full sale price of the land. McCloskey sold the completed houses back to Clark six months later, in November 1875.⁴⁸ He thereby relinquished further control to the developer, who would negotiate later sales alone. Such a binding agreement between financier and builder indicates that Clark, like Jenks on Chester Avenue, foresaw his venture's profit and wanted to maintain control of the houses. Also, he insured the project's completion by effectively forcing the builder to work within his plan through conditions of the property sale, as Govett had done on Sansom Street.

All of these developers' schemes suggest a continuing anticipation of demand for a kind of suburban housing in West Philadelphia in the 1870s which differed markedly from more generously planned and ornate products of the earliest speculators. In this latest group of rowhouses on Locust Street, Clark had restricted building within twenty feet of the street, leaving room for a porch and yard as the one amenity of the site plan. He thereby created a block front which grafted the traditional green space and covered entrance of attached and single houses of the suburbs onto the continuous front of rowhouses, which in the old city usually met the street directly, without such gestures. The design of the facades likewise shows a measure of care for the attractiveness of what was an essentially urban house type designed to appeal to suburban residents. Decorative brickwork along the cornice, stepping down the street, and arched windows with colorful heads and connecting string courses are motifs similar to those on rows built around the same time on nearby Irving and Sansom Streets (Plate 13).

The families who leased or rented homes on Locust were among fifty or more households who moved into new rowhouses in the

48. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, sale of property from John McCloskey to Clarence Clark in Deed Book F.T.W. 320, p. 443; agreement between Clark and McCloskey in Deed Book F.T.W. 204, p. 333.



PLATE 13. 4000 Block of Locust St. (*Joseph Str.*)

neighborhood between 1872 and 1880. Their heads had a variety of occupations of similar status. They included railroad officials, teachers, and dealers in such special commodities as tobacco and watches, as well as the more characteristically suburban merchants and lawyers. Families continued to average about three children, almost all retained servants, and only one had boarders. Over half of the heads of household on Locust Street commuted to downtown offices, all as sole heads or partners in business or the professions. While all but one on this particular block were native born, similar groups of these later arrivals to the suburbs on Sansom and Irving Streets included more than a third who were first or second generation immigrants from a variety of countries, including France, Wales, and Germany.⁴⁹

While more varied in occupation and background than households in earlier suburban developments in West Philadelphia, these incoming families as a group were still very different from the oldest residents of the area. Most of these occupied smaller rowhouses than those in the new projects, usually built in groups of four or five, including wood as well as masonry dwellings. The active center of the old community was along the west side of 40th Street between Walnut and Locust, where a shopping arcade stands today. Along the horse car route on these blocks stood a stable, a dry goods store, a butcher shop, law and realty offices, a carpenter, plumber, and a tavern run by an Irish family. Off this main street, which separated the area from wealthier housing east of the tracks, lived a group of black and immigrant families whose members worked at different jobs. Some had employment as machinists, postmen, or policemen, others served neighboring families as laundresses and coachmen, while the majority were simply laborers.⁵⁰

The most striking contrast between new and old residents is on the 4000 block of Locust Street. Directly across from Clark's new row, which housed lawyers, salesmen and editors in 1880, there lived fifteen families of decidedly lower status. One third of these households were black, with husbands working as laborers and waiters and wives as washerwomen. They lived next door to the African Methodist Church, one of several black parishes in the area. Immigrant families on the same block were from Baden, Ireland, and England, with individuals working as machinists, carpenters, and

49. U.S. Population Manuscript Census Schedule, 1880, City of Philadelphia, Ward 27, District 577; *McElroy's City Directory* (Philadelphia, 1880 and 1881).

50. *Ibid.*

dressmakers, and also serving as coachmen. Three heads of household living on the same side of the block were white and native born. The same contrast existed along neighboring Irving Street where Clark had sold land for another new row above and across from twenty-four older households, all but three of which were black, with most heads employed as laborers.⁵¹

The pattern along these streets in 1880 was very exceptional for West Philadelphia at that time. Rich and poor did not usually live on the same block, and in the rare cases where they were in such close proximity they occupied houses back-to-back, facing on different streets as in Govett's plan for Sansom Street. Projects of the 1870s such as Clark's, intended to meet a demand for housing middle-class commuters, brought together disparate groups whose separation had been an almost invariable characteristic of earlier suburban housing throughout the area. Such later developments likewise introduced urban density and architectural uniformity which the first speculators had sought to avoid in their schemes of land division and house design.

Toward the end of the period 1850-1880 one sees similar points of intense development both within and beyond early Hamiltonville. A large project along Locust, 36th, and Walnut Streets, near the new campus of the University of Pennsylvania, resembled those of Clark west of 40th Street. Here four-story rowhouses were set within an area of predominantly smaller homes of tradesmen and workers (Plate 8). Extensive projects continued south of 34th Street where a single real estate dealer, George B. Colliere, built over fifty brownstone rowhouses along Walnut Street, Woodland Avenue, and 33rd (Plate 10). Similar development of entire block fronts of rowhouses intended for commuters also occurred in outlying areas such as Saint Mark's Square, north of the Clark Estate, and along Sansom and Chestnut Streets above 44th (Plate 5). Throughout this older section of West Philadelphia similar trends prevailed. Developments entailed higher land values, greater numbers of housing units in higher densities, and more economic design than the early projects around them. The desire for residential retreat from working life which had been the impetus for the area's initial growth as a suburb in the 1850s had begun to transform it into an extension of the city itself.

51. *Ibid.*

THE EVOLUTION OF SUBURBAN FORM

A pattern of suburbanization characteristic of much later development on the edge of the metropolis emerges out of the confusing and sometimes contradictory story of residential projects in West Philadelphia. West Philadelphia was a pioneer suburb, and as such did not exhibit some of the features we have come to associate with the form as it has evolved over time. Even so, in this description we can identify, in fledgling form, many elements which are now part of the canon of the suburbs, and we can trace their evolution in later Philadelphia suburbs such as Overbrook Park, Chestnut Hill, Oak Lane, and Levittown.

Our portrait of West Philadelphia's growth from 1850 to 1880 indicates the parameters of speculative real estate development in the Philadelphia region during this period. By 1880 the limits of such development had been reached, given the existing state of financing, building, and sales practices. Financing was generally provided by private individuals, often those who owned the land which was to be developed, rather than by corporate entities able to command much greater sums of capital. Bonding and control were accomplished by the still-primitive methods of sale and cash advances to builders, with the developer often regaining control of the finished houses before final sale to the new owners. In years characterized by an uncertain financial climate, and resulting short-term outlays of capital, private developers could not afford to make long-range commitments to large-scale building, and thus their vision was often limited to projects encompassing at most several block fronts within a relatively small area.

West Philadelphia's early image as an entire village of genteel estates was gradually modified as housing demands changed during the century. The most typical early speculative pattern was to divide a block front into lots suitable for single and larger attached houses, such as on Woodland Terrace. Still smaller lots for twins and row-houses characterized later development as more and more individuals left the city for a home in the suburbs. The block-front unit of subdivision and design insured that the new suburban development would at least maintain the illusion of social class homogeneity along individual rows of residences. A uniformity of appearance, of price, and of situation attracted startlingly similar groups of households, corresponding to the acutely-felt gradations in social class recognized by nineteenth-century society at large.

This pattern of block front homogeneity was not, however, a product of suburbanization. Philadelphia, creature of Quaker rationality and economy that she was, had developed a similar pattern even during the colonial period, the time of the initial development of row housing in the city. The large blocks laid out by William Penn had long since been subdivided with interstitial streets and alleys cut into the original grid plan, providing additional block fronts for new rows of houses. A typical building scheme of the 1840s and 50s was the simultaneous construction of a magnificent townhouse on one of the city's primary east-west streets and provision of worker rows in the mews, fronting on alleys cut through the interior of the block. Although the social class of those living over the back fence might be far removed from that of the residents of the mansion, the latter often owned both dwellings, and used the poorer housing as a source of extra income. No stigmatization of the townhouse dwellers accrued due to the proximity of laborers and service workers; the arbiter of both social status and contact was the block front, and not the square block. In many areas of the city, one can discern a regular progression down the socioeconomic ladder in the residents of the major east-west thoroughfares, the intersecting north-south numbered streets, and finally the interstitial alleys.

In many ways, appearance governed reality for late nineteenth-century suburban dwellers. The appearance of social homogeneity along the block front ensured the status of those individuals living within the residences. The closest analog is not the modern suburb, homogeneous though it may be. Modern suburban homogeneity tends to be areal, including the houses over the back fence as well as those along the same street. Rather, these early 19th-century suburbs took their form from the speculative developments in London's West End that occurred after the fire of 1666. Here, again, homogeneity was enforced on the facing block, where styles, roof lines, and overall appearance were rigidly controlled. The mews, however, were a different story altogether, and presented a jumble of roof lines, ornamentation (or lack of it), outbuildings, and other modifications. As Steen Eiler Rasmussen has noted, while the house fronts of the West End were Georgian, the mews were Gothic.⁵²

52. Paraphrased in James E. Vance, Jr., *This Scene of Man: The Role and Structure of the City in the Geography of Western Civilization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 244.

This Georgian (or, as Vance terms it, *London Rebuilt*) model was continued in West Philadelphia where suburban developers unable to afford more than one or two block fronts controlled only scattered residential streets.⁵³ The private visions which some may have had of idyllic suburban life were always tempered by financial realities. If more profit or less risk were to be gained by increasing density and building rows of houses of a somewhat lower class to satisfy continued demand on the part of would-be commuters, developers were more than happy to oblige. It was the complex pattern of land ownership in West Philadelphia, combined with the changing economic situation, which thus led to such seeming oddities as Clarence Clark's solid block front of higher-status homes across the street from existing lower-class housing. Yet these responses to the increasing demand for housing and consequent rise in land values ultimately spelled the end of the area's suburban character. Land became more expensive as the area's desirability increased, and the developers responded by raising the density of development in order to maximize the return on their initial investment. Enclaves of earlier spacious suburban homes remained, some of them the subject of this study, but denser, more urban building schemes came to characterize further growth west of the Schuylkill.

Among those sections of old Hamiltonville which maintained their suburban character, the large estates along Chestnut, Walnut, 42nd, and other streets served as buffers against development for many years. As for the large early mansions and twins, smaller family size, and the growth of the local commercial infra-structure eventually dictated that many of these residential dinosaurs be carved up into apartments or fall prey to the wrecker's ball. As continued development transformed the remaining city land from 45th Street west to Cobb's Creek into an urban neighborhood from 1880 to 1920, suburban projects were built further out, often near commuter railroad stations, rather than along the streetcar lines. The experiments carried out by developers and builders in West Philadelphia, however, left their mark on subsequent communities along the Main Line and around the periphery of the city. Streetcars replaced omnibuses, trolleys replaced streetcars, and eventually the automobile replaced them all, but the patterns apparent in the early growth in West Philadelphia, often multiplied many times in scale, served as guideposts for later projects such as Overbrook Park.⁵⁴

53. *Ibid.*

54. Margaret March, *op. cit.*

Thus, basic elements of modern suburbanization were all present in West Philadelphia between 1850 and 1880. The division of large estates into smaller plots for development was a pattern that was to be replicated in most, later residential projects. Uniformity of housing, which later was enforced through restrictive zoning laws, was achieved in West Philadelphia through covenants and financial control imposed by the developer on the builder. Repetitive adaptation of architectural styles with strong associative value characterized these early suburban streets as it does today's subdivisions. Social homogeneity, perhaps the most significant hallmark of the modern suburb, was anticipated in the extension of the old city's pattern of block-front uniformity into the area, and insured by sales practices aimed at maintaining a certain social cachet. The habit of commuting to work in the central city, though the mode of transportation changed over time, was also established by omnibus lines over the river. In West Philadelphia the market had been both created and exploited, and a new suburban style of living had appeared. Later developers, though they dealt with different tastes and needs, at least knew that they were on secure footing in their support of suburban residential projects.

NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS.

Mr. Printer,

I observe that some papers in this city, communicate to the public, all the important events that befall individuals, such as jokes passed upon oyster-men—chimney sweeps jostled against a spruce beau, and roguish boys alarming families with *runaway raps*. Mr. Printer, I have a great ambition to let my affairs be known, at least such as are very interesting. Please, therefore to inform the public, that at six o'clock last evening, I called to see a young Lady, that I am very fond of, and to my inexpressible grief, she was not at home. Mr. Printer, will not everybody sympathize with

Bob Short

[The *Pennsylvania Herald, and General Advertiser*, 28 February 1787]

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