

**"FARMS DON'T PAY":  
THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE  
PHILADELPHIA METROPOLITAN  
LANDSCAPE, 1880-1930**

*Anne E. Krulikowski  
West Chester University*

"All the adjoining farms, with one or two exceptions,  
have been laid out as Building Lots."  
Bell Road Park Subdivision Plan, 1888

In 1880, the southwest portion of Philadelphia provided little if any physical evidence that it was part of the second largest city in the country.<sup>1</sup> Life remained essentially as it had been almost two and one-half centuries earlier when Swedish farmers established scattered plantations throughout the vicinity. By 1790, many English families had joined them. Nineteenth-century censuses depict the relatively unchanging way of life led by successive generations of persisting local families and new arrivals to the area. After 1880, change occurred rapidly. In the early eighties, land speculators began purchasing local farms; by 1885, several investors were advertising building lots for sale to home-seeking families and smaller-scale investors. By World War I, land speculators had divided local farms into more than 11,500 building lots—at least on paper. Though farming survived in this vicinity until 1960, after the turn of the century farming was never again the dominant occupation of local residents.<sup>2</sup>

The transformation of southwest Philadelphia from agricultural to suburban was part of a larger transformation occurring throughout the Philadelphia metropolitan region. The real estate advertisements in Philadelphia newspapers provide ample evidence that beginning in the early 1880s farms throughout the region were subdivided into tens of thousands of building lots, altering the landscape of outlying municipal wards and adjacent townships. This transformation was not unique to Philadelphia: immigrants and rural migrants flooded many eastern and midwestern cities during these years. American cities probably grew larger and at a faster rate than cities elsewhere in the western world, but European cities such as London experienced similar land speculation and building booms between 1880 and 1930.<sup>3</sup>

The land speculation boom that occurred in Philadelphia transformed large expanses of agricultural land directly into residential subdivisions. This conversion of farm fields directly into residential building lots and suburbs does not conform to the better known pattern of suburban development first described by Sam Bass Warner in his landmark study of Boston. Most historians of suburbanization have accepted Warner's model of Boston suburbanization as a national pattern, but the Philadelphia landscape and evidence offered by the real estate pages of Philadelphia newspapers suggest that variations from the more familiar model of suburban development occurred.<sup>4</sup>

There are three strands to the story of the rapid transformation of agricultural land in the Philadelphia metropolitan region in the late nineteenth century. One concerns the subdividers, land associations, and builders who purchased farms, registered subdivision plans, advertised building lots, and sometimes extended financing plans to smaller-scale speculators and home builders. This is also the story of thousands of thrifty, hard-working families: native-born and immigrant, white and black, these families purchased building lots, built or paid for a new suburban home, and fashioned a life and a landscape to meet their needs. The first part of this story, however, is the narrative of the farming families—many of whom lived on land that had been worked by grandparents, great-grandparents, and earlier ancestors—who sold their land to investors. The focus here is on those families as the overpowering tide of the city's industrial might engulfed them.<sup>5</sup>

### **"With Kingsessing, in the Background"<sup>6</sup>**

Like other outlying wards, in 1880 lower southwest Philadelphia was a completely rural area within the municipal boundaries of Philadelphia (Figure 1).



Quakers arrived, Swedish farmers were well established on plantations throughout the area. Under English rule, Kingsessing Township became the southern of two Philadelphia county townships west of the Schuylkill River. Kingsessing seemed so remote to early Philadelphians (although other areas of the county were and are farther from the colonial core) the city government located the early quarantine hospital there. The Penrose Ferry operated from Passyunk to Province Island, on which the pest house stood. Adjacent to the Tinicum marsh, which straddled Philadelphia and Delaware Counties, the southernmost section of Kingsessing was divided into islands, separated from the mainland and each other by an extensive network of creeks crisscrossing the vicinity.

In the 1880s, while subdividers truthfully described their building lots as within five miles of the new City Hall, the locations of the Schuylkill River crossings (the Penrose Ferry connecting lower Kingsessing with Passyunk and the Gray's Ferry Bridge at the northern edge of Kingsessing) meant that the roundabout journey was several miles longer. In the 1830s, the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad procured the right to enter the city and laid tracks from Wilmington to Philadelphia, a route that traveled through Chester, over the Tinicum marsh and up through Kingsessing to cross the Schuylkill River in the vicinity of Gray's Ferry. Railroad transportation did not generate development in the area: until the line was abandoned several years *before* residential subdivision in the mid-1880s, Bell Road Station was the lone station between Gray's Ferry Bridge in northern Kingsessing and the new quarantine hospital in Essington, Delaware County.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, population growth in Kingsessing Township lagged far behind almost every other township in Philadelphia County. Between 1820 and 1830, Kingsessing was one of only three of the thirteen townships in the county to experience a population decrease (from 1,188 to 1,068, or ten percent).<sup>7</sup> In 1840, almost eighty percent of Kingsessing residents were engaged in agriculture. At mid-century, only one small village—Paschalville—existed in the township. This tiny village was located at the junction of Island Road and Woodland Avenue, which extended from Grey's Ferry to Darby. By 1850, the Passmore Cotton Mill, located southwest of this intersection, employed members of families clustered in that immediate vicinity. About one mile to the south, lower Kingsessing remained agricultural and rural. Island and Tinicum roads, the Penrose Ferry Road, and a few small lanes were the only thoroughfares shown

on contemporary maps. Except for local residents, the only people who traveled on Island and Tinicum roads were probably those journeying to and from the Essington quarantine station or Fort Mifflin.<sup>8</sup>

With the 1854 Act of Consolidation, former Kingsessing Township became part of a city ward. Incorporation generated development in northern West Philadelphia, especially adjacent to Market Street, but not in lower southwest Philadelphia. Public institutions were almost completely absent. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic families traveled to the northern part of the township or Delaware County to attend Sunday church services. Before the land speculation boom of the 1880s, two taverns and a racetrack constituted the only non-agricultural business endeavors. Neither tavern was located near the railroad station, indicating they catered to local farmers and soldiers stationed at the fort. The racetrack enjoyed some reputation and was the only site that brought outsiders to the vicinity.<sup>9</sup>

The 1880 census was the last to depict the relatively unchanging way of life that characterized this vicinity for almost two and one-half centuries. The fifty-one heads of household in the lower Kingsessing area were engaged in the following occupations:<sup>10</sup>

Farmer, Market Gardener	26
Farm Hand	8
Keeps House (widow)	1
Horse Dealer	1
Milkman	3
Butcher	1
Teamster	1
Machinist	1
Retail Liquor	3
Railroad Boss	1
Laborer	5

Heads of household identified as farmers and market gardeners either owned or rented farms. The widow, Elizabeth Ramboe, also owned a farm, making a total of twenty-seven farm households. Adding these to the eight farmhands, the three dairy farmers, the horse dealer, and one laborer who worked on his father-in-law's farm, a total of forty of the fifty-one

household heads lived and/or worked on a farm. This figure was almost exactly the same percentage of the population engaged in agriculture forty years earlier.

The dominance of farming occupations is just one of several patterns evident on this and earlier censuses. The census manuscripts from 1790 through 1880 indicate that many families persisted for several generations, persisting families tended to prosper and purchased several noncontiguous properties, farmers could increase their acreage because they had assistance from sons and other relatives as well as paid farmhands, many households included female domestics, and sons almost without exception took up farming like their fathers.

Family persistence for four or more generations was not uncommon. Nineteenth-century historians J. Thomas Sharf and Thompson Westcott described early Swedish settlers as "tenacious" in holding on to their Kingsessing plantations when the English moved into the area. So, too, many English families found the locality to their liking and successive generations reaching adulthood remained on the same property or purchased farms nearby. Eleven families recorded on the 1880 census (slightly more than 20 percent) were present in 1790. Each succeeding census after 1790 added names of families who stayed in lower Kingsessing for several generations.<sup>11</sup>

Those who persisted tended to be among the most prosperous, although the old question regarding persistence (were families successful because they persisted or did families stay because they were successful) cannot be answered from census manuscript information.<sup>12</sup> The average real estate valuation for those who declared a value in 1850 (the first of the three censuses to include this information) was approximately \$8,000. Valuations for farmers ranged from the \$300 declared by Alexander Immold on the Penrose Ferry Road to the \$20,000 of Clement Erwig, Sr., on Tinicum Road.

Many southern Kingsessing farmers earned a secure livelihood. The two most prosperous families, however, were those for whom farming was not the primary occupation. In 1850, iron manufacturer Justice Cox was one of the wealthiest residents in Kingsessing Township. No real estate value was recorded by the census, but Cox did own his land: he was the great-grandson of the Swedish Peter Cock who had come to America with Johann Printz and settled on a plantation bordering Cobb's Creek. Justice Cox's wife, Mary Maloney, was the daughter of the second largest landowner in the township.

His extensive household included five male farm laborers and three Irish female domestics, indicating that the family had considerable means. After the mid-century census, the family disappeared from the vicinity. Justice Cox, Jr., had no connection with the area as an adult. He, too, became a very successful pig iron manufacturer and resided in the prestigious Rittenhouse Square neighborhood.<sup>13</sup>

The activities and fortune of the Passmore family, who owned the cotton mill in Paschalville but for a time lived in lower Kingessing, demonstrate the greater financial rewards to be earned from industrial activities. In 1850, the highest real estate valuation (\$80,000) in the township was recorded for 70-year-old Lewis Passmore. Consistently identified as a farmer in this and subsequent censuses, Passmore did own several farm parcels in the southern part of the ward, but the cotton mill undoubtedly accounted for the bulk of his real estate wealth. Like many lower Kingessing farming households, Passmore's included two female servants—one Irish and one black—as well as several male laborers. By 1860, Lewis was deceased and his son John was described as a gentleman with \$75,000 in real estate and a personal estate worth \$1,000. While John's son and other Passmore family members owned farmland in lower southwest Philadelphia until the end of the nineteenth century, by that time they no longer resided in lower Kingessing and were among the first families to sell property to investors in the 1880s.

This family was not typical of lower Kingessing farm families: the Passmores seem to have had little attachment to the vicinity and regarded farming as one of several economic activities that added to the family's income. When Passmore family members saw the opportunity to sell their land for a profit, they did so and moved on. Sellers Hoffman, who bought the Passmore cotton mill (ca. 1870), also purchased farmland in lower Kingessing. Hoffman, however, lived elsewhere and rented the farm to another family, clearly regarding the property as an investment rather than a residence. Several prominent colonial citizens had enjoyed country homes in lower Kingessing, but well before 1850 those who sought success in the urban world found this vicinity at once too remote for a primary residence and too close to the city for a fashionable country seat.

The most prosperous Kingessing families were those for whom farming was a secondary occupation, but those for whom farming was a primary livelihood also experienced increasing prosperity at mid-century. Almost all the families who declared property values on the three censuses asking for

such information (1850, 1860, 1870) experienced increases in both real estate and personal property valuations, with the largest increases in real estate. In spite of the depression of the late 1850s, many local farmers doubled and even tripled their wealth during that decade. In the ten years from 1850 to 1860, the Erwig family real estate valuation increased from \$20,000 to \$50,000. The fortune of William Regli, whose farm was just across Tinicum Road from the Erwigs, increased from \$12,000 to \$25,000. Those who began with smaller valuations saw similar increases. For instance, Lemuel Lindsay, whose farm was on Tinicum just below Island Road, valued his real estate at \$3,000 in 1850 and \$8,000 by 1860. The following decade appears to have been just as successful for these and other families. Despite the sketchy information recorded in 1870, the available information indicates that through 1870 farming was a successful occupation for most families who remained in Kingessing Township for more than one decade.<sup>14</sup>

The success that many families enjoyed can be at least partly attributed to the fact that local farmers had a significant amount of help from male relatives and paid workers. Of the thirty-one families owning or renting farms in 1880, sixteen had the help of forty-three live-in farm and garden hands. Most farmers with paid help had no children at home or only young children, but several men assisted by sons also had enough land and financial success to support one or two live-in laborers as well. Only three families who owned or rented farms had no apparent help. These farmers might have employed one or more of the laborers who headed other households, but the census during this period does not indicate whether farmers were employers; live-in boarders described as "farm hands" are assumed to work on the farm where they boarded. The wives of two farmers with no obvious help were assigned the occupation "goes to market." Thus, except for one farmer, every man owning or renting a farm seems to have had some assistance with his agricultural labors, help that increased the likelihood of success.

Some families purchased additional parcels, which their sons eventually took over. Generally, sons began working as a farmhand at about the age of 16, after finishing high school. Sometime in their twenties, young men rented or purchased their own farm. The eldest son often remained at home, taking over more of the farming duties as his father aged. Finally, the father became a "retired farmer" and the son inherited the title of "farmer." Of course, between 1800 and 1880, several sons disappeared from the local



area; whether they took up farming elsewhere or opted for other occupations is unknown. Much more commonly, young men, even those growing up in families with four, five, and even six sons, took up farming somewhere in Kingessing Township. These patterns are evident in many family histories.

The large Gaul family was one of the longest persisting in southwest Philadelphia. Both an Adam and a John Gaul were listed in the 1790 census and Gauls were present in every census through 1930. During the mid-nineteenth century, Adam Gaul probably rented a farm because he gave personal estate valuations but never real estate valuations. At times, his household included as many as four male farmhands. Adam had eleven children, including five sons, all of whom took up farming. In 1870, Adam, Jr., lived at home and worked with his father; John F. and William farmed properties adjacent to their father's; Jacob and Franklin had established themselves on properties in the northern part of the township.

The Holstein family remained in the area as long as the Gaul family. Peter "Holston" had established his farm at the intersection of Island Road and Tinicum Avenue by 1790. In the middle of the century, son Peter B. Holstein's household included his wife and children, female Irish domestics, and five farm laborers. Peter's mother, Jane, was also part of his household for many years; in the 1860 census, Jane valued her real estate at \$20,000 and her personal estate at \$5,000. In the same year, Peter valued his real estate at \$8,000 and his personal estate at \$5,000. As they prospered, the Holstein family purchased more land in the immediate neighborhood and in the vicinity of Paschalville.

A few families who arrived at mid-century appear to have been quite successful before engaging in farming. German-born Clement Erwig first appeared in the 1840 census. His prosperous household included his Swiss-born wife, Clement, Jr. (described as a farmer), several other children, five farm laborers, and four female Irish domestics (Figure 2). At mid-century, Erwig valued his real estate at \$20,000. Ten years later, Clement, Jr., had inherited real estate valued at \$50,000 and a personal estate of \$5,000. Sometime after the Erwigs moved into the vicinity, Mrs. Erwig's brother, William Regli, purchased a 125-acre farm just across Tinicum Road from the Erwigs. In 1860, Regli declared \$12,000 in real estate. By 1870, with no additional land acquisition in the township, Regli's real estate had increased in value to \$25,000. After Regli retired, his son Joseph took over the property.



**FIGURE 2:** Clement Erwig, Jr., son of a prosperous farming family in lower southwest Philadelphia in the mid-nineteenth century. After his early death, sister Mary Anne was one of the first to sell the family farm to land speculators in the 1880s. Source: Rev. James J. Sullivan, "History of St. Clement's Parish," *Historical Sketch of St. Clement's Parish* (Philadelphia: Jeffries and Manz, 1940).

In the years just prior to residential development, families continued to arrive in lower Kingsessing and engage in farming. Twenty-two-year-old Neal McCaulley arrived from Ireland in 1870 and in that year boarded in the Erwig household. McCaulley appears only on the second enumeration so his occupation was not recorded. Most likely, McCaulley worked as a farmhand for the Erwigs: Mary Anne Erwig had just taken over the management of the farm after the untimely death of her brother, Clement, Jr., and probably needed another hand on the property. Before the 1880s, young men had little reason to reside in lower Kingsessing unless they were farmers or worked with horses. Ten years later, McCaulley was described as a retail liquor dealer, an endeavor that provided McCaulley with the income to purchase land. He added to his holdings and in the early twentieth century all five of McCaulley's sons spent some years working on the family farm.

Philadelphia census takers documented the decline of agricultural occupations in the city. Before 1870, census takers distinguished between "master farmer," "farmer," and "farm laborer." As farms became fewer in number, farmers were no longer accorded status as defined within the occupational hierarchy of an independent and prominent occupation, but solely in terms of the products they provided to the urban market. Instead of master farmer, men were identified as dairy and pig farmers, truck farmers (vegetables), and

market gardeners (flowers). Henry Simon, a 40-year-old market gardener, first appeared in the vicinity in the 1870 census. In 1880, Henry's 24-year-old son William was also a market gardener and another son worked as a farmhand on Henry's farm. William married the daughter of neighbor John Slook and eventually took over the Slook farm. In the early decades of the twentieth century, all three of William's sons were farmers.<sup>15</sup>

These patterns were disrupted in the 1880s. A combination of industrial growth, immigration, national economic trends, changes to the landscape in southwest Philadelphia, and proximity to the city that was creeping toward them, created a situation in which most lower Kingsessing farmers found selling their land more profitable than working it. Many local farmers began selling their land to investors, who marketed building lots to working-class families, while their own sons joined the industrial workforce and purchased lots in the new subdivisions carved out of their family farms.

### "Philadelphia Is Fast Growing"<sup>16</sup>

Philadelphia offered great possibilities for widespread land investment and development in the late nineteenth century. The 1854 Annexation Act had increased the size of the city to 129 square miles. After the Civil War, Philadelphia capitalists and industrialists turned the city into the "workshop of the world" and greater numbers of immigrants looked to Philadelphia as a final destination. New large-scale industrial enterprises and the growing population provided greatly enhanced opportunities to profit from the building trades and investment in building and rental properties; the expanding building trades also provided employment opportunities for thousands of skilled and unskilled workers. Center city and adjacent wards experienced the largest capital investment in building. Here, tall office buildings and most especially the new City Hall and the mammoth Broad Street Station, both reputed to be the largest buildings of their type in the world, presented the most obvious signs of Philadelphia's great building boom.<sup>17</sup>

Several already established villages in wards more distant from the central core experienced similar rapid growth. The development of these centers followed the familiar model of suburbanization. For instance, in the years preceding the metropolitan-wide boom, West Philadelphia experienced its own boom and bust cycle. West Philadelphia was the location of several early industrial suburbs that had developed along major transportation routes into and

out of the city. The big impetus for phenomenal growth in West Philadelphia, of course, was the Centennial Exhibition. In anticipation of tremendous crowds of visitors, a new railroad terminal was constructed in the borough and many street railway lines were laid. These new and convenient transportation lines generated real estate speculation and hundreds of commuters moved to West Philadelphia. Speculation far surpassed the number of families who could afford to commute to jobs in the city, though, and the Centennial boom was followed by a similarly dramatic decrease in West Philadelphia real estate values. Land sales began again only as the entire metropolitan region was swept up in the land speculation fever that began in the mid-1880s.<sup>18</sup>

During this boom, transportation improvements generated fast-paced development in Germantown, also a vicinity in which early villages had grown up around mills. When the Pennsylvania Railroad extended its Germantown line farther westward to Chestnut Hill, frenzied real estate activity occurred in these two sections of the city. "The whole of Germantown is for sale," reported a resident in the spring of 1887. Property values in the Germantown and Chestnut Hill area doubled and even trebled in one-year periods, with the effect that "nearly every one who has any land upon which dwellings are not already erected [was] offering it for sale." Like the West Philadelphia boom of the 1870s, the suburbanization of Germantown and Chestnut Hill provide examples where residential development followed transportation lines to earlier established outlying villages.<sup>19</sup>

Since first described by Sam Bass Warner, historians have accepted this model of suburbanization—population spreading outward from urban centers to villages and mill towns surrounding the city—as the typical pattern of suburban growth in northeastern cities. Several historians of Philadelphia have identified this model of development for the suburbs already noted. Margaret Marsh, for instance, examined the impact on earlier established "nonurban working-class industrial settlements" in northern West Philadelphia as they developed into suburban residential communities. This pattern of suburban development, in which "a city's settlement extended to a previously established village, such as commonly happened in parts of Philadelphia, Boston, and other older eastern cities" has dominated scholarly thinking. Roger Simon, studying several Milwaukee suburbs, believed he found a significant deviation from this "typical" pattern of suburban development characteristic in the northeast. Simon noted that "the expansion of Milwaukee in the northwest occurred on relatively open, unsettled land," by which he meant an area characterized solely by "farm land" with no earlier village settlement. The development of southwestern

Philadelphia and other outlying wards of the city indicates that the model of suburbanization Simon identified in Milwaukee was a more common pattern of suburbanization than previously suspected.<sup>20</sup>

West Philadelphia, Germantown/Chestnut Hill, Manayunk, and a few other outlying areas of post-Consolidation Philadelphia have been well studied precisely because they were early villages, with names, identities, and histories distinct from their rural surroundings. The relatively uneventful history of southern Kingsessing created no landmarks known to residents elsewhere in the city; southwest Philadelphia was indistinguishable from the Tinicum marshes. Not surprisingly, early investors in the 1880s had difficulty identifying the locations of their subdivisions to the readers of real estate advertisements. At that time, old Kingsessing Township was roughly the southern portion of Ward 27. Those selling farms and building lots in the 1880s simply headed their advertisements "West Philadelphia, 27th Ward." This "address" could not have been particularly helpful because Ward 27 encompassed half the area west of the Schuylkill River. Subdividers also included the names of their new subdivisions, which would not have been any more enlightening to Philadelphians.<sup>21</sup> Many later historians have assumed the area did not begin to develop residentially until the 1920s land boom, when a local realtor designated lower southwest Philadelphia as "Eastwick" and established the Greater Eastwick Improvement Association. By 1920, however, two thousand families already owned or rented dwellings in these subdivisions.<sup>22</sup>

Like southern Kingsessing, in 1880 most Philadelphia wards were largely or almost entirely agricultural. When the 1854 Act of Incorporation increased the size of the city, the municipal government recognized that most of the newly acquired land was used for agriculture and would not be converted to urban use for some time. City officials established a three-tiered tax rate—city, suburban, and farm—that acknowledged this variety of land uses within Philadelphia municipal boundaries. As late as 1880, the urban area of Philadelphia (the center city business district and surrounding commercial and residential wards) covered only about sixteen square miles. From 1886 to 1887, early into the building boom, assessments at the city rate increased by \$24,000,000; this total represented ninety percent of the amount paid in taxes, but only a mere twelve percent of the city's physical space. Beyond the sixteen square mile urban core, Philadelphia's remaining 113 square miles did contain a few scattered early mills and industrial sites surrounded by small villages, but most of Philadelphia's landscape was rural and agricultural. During the frenzied land speculation boom from 1880 until the mid

1890s, much of this rural vicinity was marketed and sold as suburban building lots to small scale speculators and to working class homebuilders.<sup>23</sup>

The astounding expansion of real estate advertising provides abundant evidence that farmland in many wards was converted into residential building lots. In 1884, the real estate section of the *Record* and other Philadelphia newspapers usually consisted of less than one-half column of advertisements. Before the end of the decade, the *Sunday Press* proclaimed a "High Water Mark" of ten full columns of real estate advertisements. The *Record* experienced a similar expansion: in the late 1880s, real estate advertisements often required two and sometimes even three full pages. Advertisements indicate that speculative builders were active in wards adjacent to center city, with little interest in more outlying wards. In this outlying area, land speculators hastened the conversion of land use from agricultural to residential by purchasing farms, subdividing these tracts, and selling building lots. Here, families built their own dwellings or purchased one from a small-scale builder who might have built a handful of dwellings. The tens of thousands of building lots sold in these outlying rural wards far outnumbered the thousands of houses built nearer to the built-up center, and thus, between the mid-1880s and 1914, building lot advertisements dominated the real estate pages.<sup>24</sup>

Between 1880 and World War I, demand for land was so intense that convenient transportation, such as that generating development in West Philadelphia and Germantown, was unnecessary to spur on land speculation and the conversion of farmland to other uses. In fact, speculators did not bother to disguise the fact that the land they were marketing still looked very much like a farm. One Montgomery County subdivider advertised a tract "now in a high state of cultivation, . . . will soon be laid out in broad avenues and streets, systematically arranged." Similarly, subdivisions located within city boundaries often advertised in the same way. Subdividers of "the charming suburb" Wissinoming (Ward 23) stated "This is a new place just being opened, about 10 miles from [center city] Philadelphia." These advertisers did not include such information to entice potential homebuilders to beautiful and spacious suburbs: they were simply revealing the bald facts of their subdivision at that time. So eager were subdividers to accrue profits on their investment (and so eager was the public to purchase) that investors did not wait until they staked out lots to initiate sales. Only *after* investors implemented a few improvements to the landscape that altered its agricultural appearance did many of these same advertisers resort to the typical

flowery depictions of city-suburbs and suburban life to entice purchasers to their subdivisions.<sup>25</sup>

### "Ripe for Development"<sup>26</sup>

Investors who marketed these building lots purchased land from the many Philadelphia farmers who were looking for more promising opportunities. By the 1880s, many observers were well aware that agriculture no longer guaranteed either a secure livelihood or the prestige formerly accorded to farmers. In the last year of that decade, the *Philadelphia Record* was one of many American newspapers to carry "AN IMPORTANT INQUIRY." This questionnaire solicited information regarding the condition of "the agricultural class." Farmers around the country were encouraged to send their detailed responses to Walter Hines Page at the Reform Club, New York City. Most of the questions implicitly acknowledged the economic and social changes that led to the Populist Party:

1. Are the farmers in your community as prosperous as they have ever been?
2. If so, to what do they chiefly owe their prosperity? If not, what has been the chief reason of the change? [Respondents were asked to disregard temporary problems and to consider social and political conditions.]
3. Will a bushel of wheat or a barrel of corn buy as many necessities of life as it did thirty years ago?
4. Have farmers gained or lost social dignity, as compared with other classes, such as merchants and mechanics?
5. Do farmers' sons show any less willingness than formerly to become farmers? If so, why?<sup>27</sup>

The transformation that began in the lower 27<sup>th</sup> Ward and other outlying areas of the city in the 1880s may or may not have resulted in part from these national economic trends. Kenneth Jackson has argued that the steadily worsening position of many American farmers in the three decades following the Civil War meant that agricultural land decreased in value. Agricultural land located within and adjacent to fast-growing American urban areas offered land speculators new opportunities for successful investment as over-crowded cities and expanding transportation networks made that same land viable for other uses.

Jackson concluded that many farmers responded "rationally" to the new economic circumstances by selling their land to speculators and land companies.<sup>28</sup>

Paul Glenn Munyon, however, has argued that despite the national decline of agricultural in the late nineteenth century, significant regional and even state-by-state variations existed. He found that expanding transportation networks and fast-growing cities and industrial workforces also created advantageous conditions for New Hampshire farmers of certain foodstuffs: dairy products, eggs, and orchard fruits and vegetables, the very items that lower Kingsessing farmers produced. There is evidence that these products continued to be profitable for lower Kingsessing farmers at least through World War I: some successful men took up farming in this vicinity as the residential subdivisions were developing, clearly anticipating opportunity. For lower Kingsessing farmers as well as farmers in other outlying wards and adjacent counties, frenzied land speculation that artificially increased land values in and adjacent to Philadelphia might have provided more motivation to sell than supposedly declining agricultural prices for these particular products. Dramatically increasing land prices certainly motivated some of the first families (Passmore family members and Sellers Hoffman, for instance) to sell their lower Kingsessing farms to land speculators. These families were primarily engaged in industry and by the 1880s regarded their farms (which they rented out) as investments. These families were not concerned with the decline of agricultural prices but engaging in land speculation themselves.<sup>29</sup>

The most prosperous farmers who sold their land to investors in the last two decades of the nineteenth century were clearly not responding to national economic circumstances. For these families, changes within the family more immediately explain the decision to sell the family farm. Eliza Holstein sold several Holstein family parcels after the death of her husband. Youngest son William was already farming, but probably could not manage three or four properties on his own. Then, William died at an early age, leaving his own wife Phoebe with a family of young sons; Phoebe sold more of the Holstein property. Unhappily for the Erwig family, only son Clement, Jr., died at an early age, leaving his sister Mary Anne to manage the property. After a few years, Mary Anne sold up and moved out of the area. The Regli family, having apparently followed their relatives to lower Kingsessing, sold their own property about the same time their niece sold her property.

Whatever varied motivations prompted families to sell their farms, the result was the same: most families sold their properties to investors before World War I. The Holstein and the Regli families sold their farms to George



Laycock, a real estate speculator who subdivided the Holstein farm himself and sold the Regli farm to a land association; the Erwig family sold their farm to the Elmwood Land Company. Once investors purchased the first two or three farms, the future of the vicinity was set on the course of residential and commercial development; rising land values created by such uses ensured that farmers thereafter marketed their properties not to other farmers but to investors willing and able to pay higher prices. Families who owned farms made decisions that suited them; renting farmers, however, had little control over their means of livelihood when property owners decided to sell up.

The Reform Club's survey suggested that by the 1880s, farmers' sons around the nation found alternative types of employment more rewarding than farming. Until the 1890s, young men reaching adulthood in this vicinity had no alternatives but agriculture if they wanted to remain in the area. Very likely, some young men growing up in Kingessing families would have chosen other occupations had they been available. A few small factories and plants moved to the "green fields" of the lower 27<sup>th</sup> Ward around the turn of the century and offered employment to some local residents of the new subdivisions. More importantly, at that time large manufacturing concerns relocated to the upper part of the ward and to adjacent Delaware County. Companies such as Brill, Westinghouse, Fels Naptha, General Electric, and Baldwin Locomotive employed thousands of men and boys. As some farming sons chose to join the industrial workforce, families with several properties undoubtedly found they had to sell off land they could no longer work.

Throughout the Philadelphia metropolitan area farmers' sons apparently *were* less willing to take up farming as a livelihood when other opportunities were available. In 1890, when Burlington County, New Jersey, farmers held a general grievance meeting, a Philadelphia journalist reported, "The general verdict was the farms in Burlington County have depreciated at least 50 per cent. in value. One problem for farmers in the [New Jersey] counties closest to Philadelphia was that they could no longer get local help, but had to secure laborers from Philadelphia, who expected high wages." Farmers' sons along with other Burlington County residents preferred to commute by ferry to Philadelphia for higher wages.<sup>30</sup>

As farmers in the metropolitan region sold up to land speculators, finding paid employment as a farmer or farm laborer became increasingly difficult. Help wanted columns in Philadelphia newspapers confirm the limited prospects for farmers. Most often, employers sought a "single man." In a few cases, a married man whose wife was willing to work in the house was also

acceptable, although children rarely were. One ad read "Married Protestant Man without family (no objection to boy about 16); must thoroughly understand farming and care of horses, and always lived in the country, to farm a small place: must have first-class references as to character, ability and sobriety: none others need apply." Farm managers could be married, but a laborer almost always had to be single.<sup>31</sup>

Facing limited employment opportunity, farmers themselves sometimes placed advertisements seeking to "take charge" of another man's farm or to become the "supervisor" of a "Gentleman's Country Seat," perhaps unconsciously adapting the occupational category from industry. For instance, in 1886 a "man with experience" and a family sought a situation "taking charge of a farm in Delaware, Maryland, or Pennsylvania." This farmer, possibly one who had previously rented a farm that had been sold to a land speculator, possessed considerable knowledge and skill for which he desired recognition. Unable to purchase his own property, the best he could hope for was to work for wages as the employee of a wealthier man. In the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, a number of successful Philadelphia businessmen purchased country seats along the western Main Line and in Chester County. Knowing little about farming and animal husbandry themselves, these men, who spent most of their time in town, depended on experienced and knowledgeable managers to oversee their property on a daily basis. Managers and supervisors, however, were paid employees and depended on a good relationship with the property owner, who thought of *himself* as a "farmer."

One owner of a Chester County country seat was prominent maritime attorney John Frederick Lewis. If the attitudes and prejudices of Lewis were typical, urban men, even if they had a lifetime of agricultural experience, were unlikely to be hired to work in any capacity on these estates. When seeking hands for his Morstein property, Lewis repeatedly informed his farm manager he did not want any city people on his estate, characterizing them as shiftless and undependable. Particularly anxious to avoid hiring recently arrived immigrants, Lewis looked to Chester County and other rural areas for his employees, at times seeking recommendations from friends as far away as Virginia. When Lewis's manager offered advice, Lewis always reminded his employee that he was paid to take orders. Such a situation could not have been congenial to a man who had formerly farmed his own or a rented property.<sup>32</sup>

If displaced farmers and farmhands had difficulties finding work, landowning farmers had no trouble selling the family farm. In November

1885, realtor Benjamin Ashwood offered one of the Passmore farm properties for sale (Figure 3). The advertised price of this fifty-nine acre tract of land alternated between \$300 and \$350 an acre. Ashwood asserted, "as building operations are booming in this section, this land will be worth \$500 per acre in short time." This tract was located just above the Elmwood Land Company's property, for which that company had paid Mary Anne Erwig \$350 an acre, and adjacent to that of the Improved Mutual Land Association, which paid William Regli more than \$400 an acre. Noting that this parcel contained "fine building sites," Ashwood directed his advertisement to "Capitalists and Land Associations." Ashwood never anticipated selling this property to a farmer: emphasizing its location between two already subdivided tracts and specifying prices paid by land associations implicitly put the property out of the price range of farmers. Ashwood's advertisements made clear what many farmers had already realized: that by the 1880s construction activity—not farming—gave value to land. Real estate brokers, not farmers, were going to reap the profits from this changed land use.<sup>33</sup>

---

WEST PHILADELPHIA.

**To Capitalists**

AND

**Land Associations.**

For sale at a great bargain, valuable Farm of about 60 acres in 27th ward, known as Passmore Property. This property has two valuable railroad fronts and also a fine frontage on Island road. The Elmwood Land Company is located just below this tract, and as buildings are going up rapidly there, it will make this farm in a short time very valuable: \$50,000 of gravel has been taken off part of this place: plenty more left. Only \$350 per acre.

apply to **BENJ. F. ASHWOOD,**  
19 S. Ninth st.

FIGURE 3: Speculator Benjamin Ashwood's advertisement for one of the Passmore farms, directed to investors rather than to farmers. The Elmwood Land Company mentioned here was already selling building lots in its own subdivision, the former Erwig farm. Source: *Philadelphia Record*, December 12, 1885.

A comparison of these acreage prices to the price of farms outside the city marketed as farms indicates how much urban land had increased in value. Many advertisements for farms in surrounding counties marketed to farmers averaged \$150 an acre, a price that often included a house, barn, other out-buildings, and even livestock and equipment. For instance, one advertisement

headed "A Chance for a Workingman" offered an 18-acre farm at Glen Loch, in the same vicinity of Chester County where John Frederick Lewis owned his country seat. Included with the farm was a stone house, barn, stables, and "wheat and rye already in ground." All this for a price of \$2,150. A farm in Berks County, outside of Reading, included 80 acres, house, barn, outbuildings, horses, 5 cows, chickens, several tons of hay, winter grain, oats, wagons plows, harnesses, and "numerous other articles" for \$2,300 cash and \$2,000 on mortgage.

Farmers within or immediately adjacent to Philadelphia could ask higher prices from the investors who intended to subdivide these properties and sell hundreds of building lots. Even if they did not sell all their lots, land speculators stood to make significant profits. A year after the two farm properties just noted were advertised, the Fern Rock Land Company (Ward 22) began advertising building lots. The company had purchased a 63-acre tract that it had divided into one thousand building lots for sale at \$100 each. Even at city acreage prices, these investors stood to make a significant profit after deducting expenses.<sup>34</sup>

Not all farmers resigned themselves to choosing between selling up or hanging on. On the southwest periphery of the city, young Irish farmer Barney Owens continued to farm and raise horses, but also tried his hand at land speculation. Acting with several partners, Owens purchased two neighboring farms and subdivided the tracts into building lots. As the experience of Owens demonstrates, investors were not always outsiders who arrived on the scene to exploit financial opportunity; some farmers saw the trends and carved out their own opportunities within these changes.<sup>35</sup>

The city's tax revenues reflected the rapid conversion of city farmland to suburbs. From 1886 to 1887, the same period during which city tax rates increased by \$24,000,000, suburban rates increased by \$2,000,000 and farm tax rates decreased by about \$200,000, as former farmland was subdivided and reclassified as suburban.<sup>36</sup> Even as rural areas within the city disappeared, scattered farms survived within the city limits for many decades. Periodically, advertisements offering city farms appeared in the *Record*. In 1888, an eight-acre truck farm with a "good house" located at Sixtieth and Pine, west of the street railways in West Philadelphia, was advertised for rent. Obviously, the property owner was going to hold on to his land until westward moving development drove up the value. Until after World War II, much of the northeast section of the city remained farmland. After 1880,

though, almost all properties advertised to farmers rather than to investors and building associations were outside—far outside—the official boundaries of the city. Benjamin Ashwood occasionally handled such properties: in the same month Ashwood marketed the Passmore farm in southwest Philadelphia to investors, he identified farmers as the most likely market for a 45-acre farm he also advertised. Tellingly, this property was located “43 miles out.”<sup>37</sup>

### Good-bye to “The Old Farm”<sup>38</sup>

Unintentionally, speculators revealed the fading prominence of farming and agricultural occupations in their building lot advertisements. Prior to the 1880s, large farms and the names of well-known property-owning families served as landmarks in rural wards of the city. As development progressed in these outlying areas, brokers and land associations necessarily relied on these family names to indicate the location of their tracts. Investors, though, were selling building lots, a change in land use they emphasized by prominently featuring the new subdivision names in building lot advertisements. In the spring of 1888, investors advertised building lots in Tinicum Township, Delaware County, in a subdivision “now known as Corbindale.” At that time, no one in Philadelphia or Delaware County was familiar with the name “Corbindale.” Relying on the former social status of the Alburger family, prominent property holders in both Tinicum Township and southwestern Philadelphia, the investors included the phrase “Former Alburger Farm” in their advertisements for several months, hoping to signal the location of their tract to newspaper readers. The frequently used qualifier “former” in front of Brognard, Passmore, and Soley farm signaled the passing of a heretofore familiar landscape and the advent of a world in which farmers were no longer noteworthy.<sup>39</sup>

The material artifacts of the agricultural world were also disappearing. Subdividers sometimes tried to sell “That large stone mansion, barn and all necessary outbuildings” untidily perched in the middle of their subdivision tract. More frequently, though, subdividers preferred to tidy up their subdivision site, demolishing the dwellings, barns, and other outbuildings of the rural landscape that did not fit neatly into their gridded subdivision plans. Shrewdly, these investors employed an ostentatiously sentimental nostalgia to distract attention from their own role as agents of change. Depicting rural life

as quaint, land speculators effectively relegated agricultural occupations to the past when, in fact, hundreds of thousands of American families still engaged in various types of farming. The best example of this can be found in the numerous and lengthy advertisements for the Main Line subdivision of Elm (present day Narberth). One advertisement cleverly headed "Ye Olden Time" described the stone mansion at Elm; the oldest portion of this dwelling had been erected in 1690, with later additions dating to 1770 and 1779. Illustrations of all three date stones accompanied the verbal description of the building. Advertisements informed readers that "A large number of people have visited this old structure, which is now being demolished to make way for modern improvements. Those who desire to take a last view should visit Elm before Monday next."<sup>40</sup>

These speculators expressed what was coming to be the new modern attitude: "We are very sorry that we are compelled to destroy this old land-mark, but, as usual, it stood right in the centre of one of the avenues and it had to go." Their tone was disingenuous: The Elm investors were certainly more concerned that all the blocks in their subdivision be squared off so they could sell as many lots as possible. They were not about to introduce any irregularity into their plan to preserve a local landmark. They did, however, promise to exhibit the three stone tablets in their office for those who were interested in seeing these "olde tyme" artifacts (no doubt while listening to a sales pitch). These businessmen justified their demolition of the old farmhouse by salvaging and displaying the three date stones, as though their sales office were a museum and they were engaged in preserving historic artifacts. The act of preserving the date stones while destroying the structures implied a judgment that the farm buildings themselves were not worthy of preservation. Erasing agricultural buildings from the metropolitan landscape was, as they noted, business as usual; obliterating any signs of "olden tymes" was progress.

The shrewdly employed "olde tyme" spelling pointedly implied that farming, too, was archaic. To Philadelphians, it must have soon seemed so. Developers and land companies boasted of the immense speed with which they transformed the landscape. Not surprisingly, the Elm developers ran self-congratulatory ads, lauding their modern spirit of progress. They itemized the changes they had made at their site "since the time we put the first spade in the old farm, about one year ago. . . . When we purchased the farm it was a very pretty place, but it was not worth what we paid for it as it stood." To improve the "old farm," the company had "opened, graded and

macadamized the avenues, laid the pavements and curbs, terraced and beautified the lots and contracted and had the Penn Globe Gas Light Company to light our beautiful broad avenues." In other words, this landscape was now habitable by civilized people.<sup>41</sup>

The Elm developers at least acknowledged that the "old farm" had been a "very pretty place." Other developers depicted former farm properties as God-forsaken scrub. Chesilhurst (Camden County, NJ) developers asserted that their tract had been "covered with sage brush," equating it with abandoned "ghost towns" on the western frontier. By autumn 1887, Chesilhurst investors pointed out that "Two and a half years ago there was not Chesilhurst. In this short time over 1100 people have purchased 5000 lots, 100 houses have been built and the population numbers nearly 500. Twenty-eight miles of avenues have been opened." The ultimate measure of progress at Chesilhurst was that residents had just voted to incorporate the borough, thus completing its transformation—legally at any rate—to an urban environment.<sup>42</sup>

The physical transformation of the metropolitan landscape from rural to suburban to urban was accompanied by, and partly created, a corresponding shift in attitudes toward any type of rural activities and those engaged in them. Building lot investors implemented "improvements" to former farms to make them "habitable"; they defined such improvements as "progress." Writers of building lot advertisements composed descriptions of an idealized "country" and "suburban" life, but carefully excluded any taint of agricultural surroundings and activities. The attitudes of land speculators paralleled the Progressive attitude of the time. In contrast to these views, in lower southwest Philadelphia, persisting farmers and new residents created an unusual residential landscape that blended residential, agricultural, commercial, and industrial land uses. Eventually, the semi-rural character of the neighborhood would explain at least as much as anything else why the neighborhood was eventually demolished.<sup>43</sup>

### Farming in the Modern City

Farming did not completely disappear from within the municipal boundaries of Philadelphia during this period. Large expanses of the northeastern area of the city remained agricultural until after World War II and in many parts of the city scattered farms could be found, for which sale notices occasionally ran in newspapers through the 1920s. In southwest Philadelphia, almost 3,000 families owned or rented houses in the new subdivisions by 1930, but

development fell far below the degree anticipated by the 11,500 lots identified on subdivision plans. By 1900, farming was no longer the dominant occupation in this vicinity, but remained an important occupation and land use.<sup>44</sup>

Some families opted out of farming as the neighborhood developed and sons joined the industrial workforce; others continued to work family farms. More surprisingly, new arrivals chose to move to this vicinity to take up farming. Between 1880 and 1910 as the residential subdivisions developed, the number of farmers who owned or rented farms actually increased.<sup>45</sup>

1880	1900	1910	1920
28	34	44	16

After the turn of the twentieth century two distinct groups of farmers lived in the neighborhood. The first consisted of long-persisting families who were white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. The second group included families from the most recently arriving immigrant groups to the United States as well as African-American and white migrants from the south. As might be expected, limited resources meant that the farming practices of some of these families differed from those traditional to the vicinity. At the same time, both groups resourcefully adopted strategies enabling them to benefit from their urban location. Their knowledge of farming helped them to make the best living from relatively small farming operations: truck and pig farming predominated, with some dairy farming and chicken raising; through 1910 two or three men were listed as horse dealers. Pig farming was suitable for these smaller holdings: pigs do not require much space, can feed on grains and garbage (in plentiful supply as the residential neighborhoods developed), and are efficient meat producers. Pig and truck farming and market gardening made economic sense for this vicinity.<sup>46</sup>

A few long-persisting farming families continued to work their farms for several more decades. One of the largest operations was the Hunter farm, near the junction of Tinicum Avenue and the Penrose Ferry Road. The Hunter family had been farming in this vicinity since the mid-nineteenth century when they operated the Penrose ferry tavern. In the 1910s, the Hunters had only one or two live-in farmhands, but at times employed as many as ten men. After her divorce, Josephine Goldhahn Brown worked as a housekeeper and cook at the Hunter farm. The busy Goldhahn produced all the baked goods used in the household and daily provided the farmhands



with lunch. This position allowed Goldhahn, daughter of a local subdivision family, to live with her parents and have their help caring for her three small children. The Hunters continued as market gardeners until World War II and former neighborhood residents recall their fields of flowers along Tinicum Road.<sup>47</sup>

Descendants of some farming families became part of the new subdivision communities. The Gaul family, first listed in the 1790 census, lost their farm in the 1890s when the property owner sold it to a speculator. At that point, male family members who remained in the immediate neighborhood took up employment in nearby industries and purchased building lots in the Clearview subdivision partly laid out on their former farmland. In the 1920s and 1930s, George Gaul was a respected realtor in the neighborhood and active in the local civic association. The sons and grandsons of Henry Simon continued to farm their land as it was surrounded by residential subdivisions and became part of the neighborhood community—they participated in the social clubs and civic associations and intermarried with the new families. Finally, in the late 1920s, the Simon family sold their land so that some family members could purchase a farm in rural Vineland, New Jersey. Their descendants continue to farm today.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps more than any other local family, the Holstein family reflects the pattern evident after the turn of the twentieth century when sons of farming families found employment in nearby industries. After the death of Peter Holstein, eldest son William inherited the property, but William died as a young man. William's four sons reached adulthood around 1900: Harry (20), a driver; William (18) a brass finisher; John (16), and George (14). During the next twenty years, William and George apparently never worked on the family farm and found employment in local industries. Harry worked the family farm until World War I, when he, too, finally exchanged farming for industrial employment. At that time, John, who had been working in local industry took the unusual step of becoming a farmer. In 1920, all four brothers lived with their families in subdivisions adjacent to the Holstein farm. John's household included a boarder, but that young man was not a laborer on John's farm—he worked in a nearby factory.

World War I was an irrevocable turning point in the history of southwestern Philadelphia: the construction of the adjacent Hog Island Shipyard and the laying of railroad tracks to that site increased the industrial activity in the vicinity. Sons of many long-persisting farm families joined the expanded industrial work force during the war, a few for the duration but many never

returned to farming. During the war, William and Charles Shisler rented their father's farm and took up industrial occupations. Afterward, both brothers and their families continued to live in subdivision houses adjacent to their former farm, but they did not return to farming. Likewise, their sons also found work in local industries.

Not all families chose to become part of the urban industrial workforce. Entrepreneur Neil McCaulley saw that his fortuitously located property at the junction of Tincum and Penrose Ferry Roads offered new possibilities. McCaulley's sons farmed through the 1920s, but during that decade, as automobile traffic increased, converted part of their land into a service station.

New arrivals continued to take up farming in this vicinity during the early years of subdivision. A few early lot purchasers built houses in these subdivisions because they wanted to take up farming part-time, although they practiced a skilled trade that provided their main source of income. Richard Goldhahn and his sons engaged in farming as a sideline and from time to time, rather than as a sole livelihood. Goldhahn and his family had lived in Kensington with convenient access to transportation to center city, where Goldhahn worked as a tinsmith on commercial and residential buildings. In 1886, Goldhahn purchased several lots in the Elmwood subdivision, where he built a family house. Goldhahn continued to work as a tinsmith in center city, but rented fields to raise potatoes and vegetables and engage in dairy farming. As adults, Goldhahn's two sons followed the same occupational pattern: a various times they worked for Westinghouse and other area industries, but farmed in between periods of industrial employment. When Charles Lindbergh visited the city in 1927, he landed in the Goldhahn potato field, soon to be absorbed into the Municipal Airport.<sup>49</sup>

After 1900, many new farmers in the vicinity were members of the great turn of the century migration from Russia, Eastern Europe, and Italy or migrants from the American South. With fewer financial resources, these farmers rented rather than purchased properties, operated smaller farms, and made do without the live-in laborers and domestic help that had made agriculture a less grueling way of life for earlier Kingsessing families. Significantly, these families rarely appeared on more than one census. Some were renters, which gave them less control over their livelihood and persistence. In general, these farmers had little help with their farm labors. Charles Lacan, an African-American farmer from Maryland, rented a truck farm on

the southern border of the residential subdivisions. Lacan's household included his wife, seven children, and his mother-in-law. Neither of Lacan's sons worked with him on the farm (one was a day laborer and the other was a lather in house construction) nor did Lacan employ help. Neighbor John Cheek, a black truck farmer from Virginia, also lacked apparent help, but did hold a mortgage on his property.

A few farmers did have at least one other pair of hands to help them with their tasks. Pig farmer Nakita Lafinchok, a Polish-speaking man who had arrived in the United States in 1903, had no sons, but his brother lived in the household and worked on the farm. The Lafinchok family had another source of income to help pay the rent: eleven Polish-speaking male boarders lived in this household. None of these borders worked on farms: one was employed as a house carpenter and the other ten worked at the Brill Streetcar Company. Boarding workers who labored in local industries, the Lafinchok family turned their urban location into an economic advantage.

Whether recently arrived immigrant or southern migrant, farming families availed themselves of the opportunity in southwest Philadelphia to make a living by the skills and knowledge they possessed. Local subdivision residents benefited from local farms in their neighborhoods. Surviving farms preserved the rural aspect of the early neighborhoods, so that these subdivisions actually did offer the type of suburban-country life depicted by earlier subdivision advertisements. Residents purchased produce and dairy products from neighborhood farmers, who functioned as local stores, selling the chickens, geese, dairy products, and produce not generally carried by most corner markets. Like neighborhood grocers, farmers often carried customers in their books and allowed them to pay when able.<sup>50</sup>

Local farmers were well known to neighborhood residents. Larry Ryback, who grew up in the Suffolk Park subdivision in the 1930s and early 1940s, remembers a neighbor who kept a pig farm in nearby Folcroft (Delaware County), using to his advantage the proximity of this area to certain industries:

There was fellow who lived right up here who had pigs over in Folcroft. He used to collect ice cream from Breyer's. Every night they had to steam out all their equipment and all the ice cream swept out was put into fifty-gallon drums. He used to feed his pigs on ice cream and corn meal that he got from a baker's shop in South Philly. The

Italians didn't use any lard or anything in the oven; they sprinkled it with coarsely ground corn meal. Then, when they cleaned out the ovens, all the corn meal would be swept up from the floor and he'd collect that.<sup>51</sup>

The so-called "piggeries," a cluster of pig farms adjacent to Darby Creek and below the Clearview subdivision, constituted the largest surviving farm area. These farmers benefited from their proximity to residential neighborhoods: they regularly collected residents' garbage to use as pig slop.

Some of the smallest farmers took advantage of the undeveloped lots in the neighborhood. Clearview resident Marie Cermak remembers one family who had a small farm on Chelwynde Avenue in the 1920s and early 1930s:

There was a family that lived on the 7800 block, a single frame house. They were farmers, backwoodsmen, you might say. They had cows that would graze in the fields across the street from my grandmother's house. Joey would come and sit on our porch and watch the cows. . . . They had a spring in their backyard, so if we had watermelon in the summer, we would take the watermelons down there and put them in the spring. They had a garden that went all the way to Dick's Avenue. They raised all kinds of vegetables and sometimes they gave us some.<sup>52</sup>

These small farms were not always distinguishable from neighboring properties. In addition to families who farmed by occupation, many neighborhood families engaged in small-scale farming activities: they kept a few horses, chickens or a pig from time to time, raised rabbits and turkeys, experimented with bee keeping, and cultivated extensive flower and vegetable gardens, activities that proliferated during the Depression. Many families purchased multiple lots; others made use of the numerous unsold lots and the undeveloped landscape of the nearby marsh.

Authors of late nineteenth-century manuals of suburban living often suggested that families raise chickens, vegetables, and even keep a cow to help offset the costs of living in the suburbs, to teach children responsibility, and to provide the pure milk and food difficult to find in the city. The years around the turn of the century, however, saw a growing popular distaste for living environments characterized by mixed land use, a distaste legally enforced in the twentieth century by the urban planning profession through

single-use zoning. When the building boom resumed in the 1920s, areas like southwest Philadelphia, where rural activities characterized the lifestyle of many families, were considered inferior and lower class. Surviving farms, large lots, and widespread rural activities marked the area to outsiders as one that had never "developed" and was, therefore, undesirable.

As evenly spaced streets supplanted farm after farm within the boundaries of the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Philadelphia boosters congratulated themselves on the progress of their great city. Many neighborhood and suburban improvement associations worked to eradicate signs of rural life from their living environments. In Chestnut Hill, for instance, the progressive improvement society was "determined to rid their houses of rural slovenliness." Residents of southwest Philadelphia exhibited a mindset at variance with this progressive attitude. The Greater Eastwick Improvement Association did press for the same urban amenities sought by other associations—sidewalks, paved roads, street lighting, traffic lights, and a firehouse. There is no evidence, though, that the GEIA leadership sought to force farmers out of the area or was in any way disturbed by their presence or the widespread rural activities. Most Clearview and Meadows residents believed that municipal services would encourage further development, but they seem to have envisioned the survival of the semi-rural character of the neighborhood.<sup>53</sup>

In the 1950s, the Redevelopment Authority publicized views of rural activities and undeveloped lots to justify demolition and redevelopment of this vicinity. There was an aesthetic and cultural division between most neighborhood residents and the planners and architects who conceived the modernist design for "New Eastwick." Residents who protested condemnation of their neighborhoods certainly did so for practical and economic reasons, but also because many accepted and even valued what middle-class professionals perceived as an untidy, even wasteful, semi-rural landscape.

## NOTES

I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee who provided helpful advice and comments along the way: J. Ritchie Garrison, Raymond Wolters, and Carol Hoffecker, all at the University of Delaware, and David Schuyler, Franklin and Marshall College. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewer for *Pennsylvania History*.

1. "Farms Don't Pay," *Philadelphia Record*, March 3, 1890, p. 2. Unless a page or column name is specified, all citations to the *Record* refer to advertisements found on the real estate page(s). The Bell Road

Park plan and those for most of the other subdivisions in this vicinity are on file in the 7<sup>th</sup> Survey District Office, Bureau of Surveys & Design, Department of Streets, Philadelphia. I appreciate the help of Raymond E. Havey, P.L.S., who made these plans easily available to me. Bell Road Park investors here exaggerated the pace of development, but accurately noted the change in land use that was underway.

2. In the 1950s and 1960s, southwest Philadelphia (approximately the southern half of Ward 40) came to national attention as the site of the Eastwick Redevelopment Project, the largest ever in the nation's history. For a detailed examination of the suburbanization of this vicinity, the neighborhood that evolved, and the redevelopment project, see Anne E. Krulikowski, "A Chance for a Workingman: The Meadows Neighborhood in Southwest Philadelphia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2001).
3. The widespread change in land use within city limits occurred throughout the adjacent surrounding region. Real estate transfers in the Philadelphia *Record* began including those in Delaware, Chester, Bucks, and Montgomery counties as well as Camden and Burlington counties in New Jersey. A number of historians have documented the land boom of the late nineteenth century: Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870 to 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); Ann Durkin Keating, *Building Chicago: Suburban Developers and the Creation of a Divided Metropolis* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988); Michael J. Doucet and John C. Weaver, *Housing the North American City* (Montreal: McGill and Queen's University Press, 1991); Mary Ellen Hayward and Charles Belfoure, *The Baltimore Rowhouse* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999). The growth of Chicago, New York, and Boston have received the most scholarly attention, but Kevin David Kane and Thomas L. Bell have demonstrated that southern cities like Knoxville, TN, also experienced tremendous growth during this period: see "Suburbs for a Labor Elite," *Geographical Review* 75 (1985), 319–34. The late-nineteenth-century building boom has been well documented for Canadian cities. See, for instance, the essays in *Shaping the Urban Landscape: Aspects of the Canadian City-Building Process*, ed. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F. J. Artibise (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982). For a comparison with England, see Helen C. Long, *The Edwardian House: The Middle-Class Home in Britain, 1880–1914* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).
4. Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*. Margaret Marsh, "Suburbanization and the Search for Community: Residential Decentralization in Philadelphia, 1880–1900," *Pennsylvania History* 44 (1977).
5. Krulikowski, "A Chance for a Workingman" discusses the role of investors and land associations and traces the history of many families who purchased building lots in southwest Philadelphia. Lower southwest Philadelphia was transformed by "subdividers," investors who registered subdivision plans with the city, implemented some improvements, and advertised and sold building lots. They were not developers in the modern sense; except for loosely enforced deed restrictions, they did not plan or control the building process in their subdivisions. Alexander von Hoffman, "Weaving the Urban Fabric: Nineteenth-Century Patterns of Residential Real Estate Development in Outer Boston," *Journal of Urban History* 22 (1996), has noted that the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw the formation of the modern real estate profession and its practices.
6. Charles R. Barker, *Philadelphia in the Late 'Forties* (Philadelphia: City History Society, 1931), 31. The area referred to today as Southwest Philadelphia was until the 1854 Consolidation part of Kingsessing Township. The Act of Consolidation designated the entire area of the city west of the

- Schuylkill River as Ward 24. In 1866, the southern area was designated Ward 27; in 1898, Ward 40. The focus area of this paper, Southwest Philadelphia, is roughly the lower half of Ward 40, from 74<sup>th</sup> Street south to the county line.
7. The other two townships were Passyunk in south Philadelphia and Moreland in the northeast. The population of Penn Township decreased between 1820 and 1830, but only because a chunk of it was added to Penn District. *Philadelphia Maps, 1682-1982: Townships - Districts - Wards*. Special Publication No. 6. (Philadelphia: Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, 1996). In addition to thirteen townships and the city of Philadelphia, Philadelphia County also included eleven districts and boroughs that had been carved from various townships between 1790 and the 1850 census.
  8. *Philadelphia Maps, 1-5*. In *Philadelphia Preserved*, 2d ed., Richard Webster noted that in 1840 exactly 77.3% of Kingessing residents were engaged in agriculture (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 386. Tinicum Island Road, as this original name indicates, was not opened for local residents but to facilitate travel between the Penrose Ferry and the Essington quarantine station, located on what had been Tinicum Island. J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1884), 3:2145.
  9. Rev. James J. Sullivan, "History of St. Clement's Parish," *Historical Sketch of St. Clement's Parish, Published on the Occasion of the 74<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of the Church, October 13, 1940* (Philadelphia: Jeffries and Manz, 1940), 14-24; *Atlas of West Philadelphia, Including the 24<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Wards, of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins & Co., 1872); *Atlas of West Philadelphia, 24<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Wards* (Philadelphia: William G. Baist, 1886). Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 3: 2145.
  10. Unless otherwise indicated, I obtained family information noted in this paper from the microfilmed copies of the census manuscripts, 1790-1920. The 1880 census divided the ward into two enumeration districts, the boundaries of which are shown on an index map. E.D. 581 *approximately* corresponds with the focus area of this paper. Comparing the 1880 census with earlier and later censuses and area maps, I have tried to identify those households that fell within my boundary from present day Island Road and 74<sup>th</sup> Street on the north and extending southwest to the county line at Darby Creek and southeast to the Delaware River. Although the method is somewhat imprecise, the depiction of life in lower Kingessing is accurate.
  11. Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 1:133. Names that appeared in the vicinity in every census from 1790 through 1880 included Cock (Cox), Rambo, Jones (originally Nilsson), Guyer, Holstone (Holstein), Black, Hunt, Matsinger, Powers, Grover, and Gaul. Descendants of all these families still resided here in 1920, although most had sold their farms and lived in the new subdivisions.
  12. For each of these three censuses about half of the families provided real estate and/or personal property evaluations. According to the staff librarian at the Federal Archives in Philadelphia, the 1870 census was enumerated twice in Philadelphia because many people were not counted the first time. The second enumeration was intended to count only those missed the first time, but I did find a number of individuals/families listed on both. For those people counted only during the second enumeration, census takers listed only name, age, and sex.
  13. Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., [1912]), 3: 329-31.

14. Maps indicate that a number of families purchased additional parcels of land, which would certainly contribute to an increase in the value of real estate they declared during these decades. The families discussed in this paragraph did not purchase additional real estate. They could have purchased additional land outside the township, but that was not the pattern for Kingsessing families; furthermore, each had only one son, making additional purchases unlikely.
15. Kenneth J. Winkle, "The United States Census and Community History," *The History Teacher* 28 (1994) explains that from 1870 to 1900 the published census used an artisanal classification scheme based on the kind of product that workers handled rather than their occupational skill or prestige (94). Whatever the reason for this change, the newer classifications reflected the market, not the worker.
16. "Philadelphia is Fast Growing," *Sunday Press*, April 6, 1890.
17. "Rapid Rise in Values," *Record*, August 16, 1887, p. 1.
18. "A Big Rise in West Philadelphia Land," in the "Real Estate World" Column, *Record*, April 1, 1890.
19. "Germantown For Sale," *Record*, April 25, 1887, p. 1.
20. Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*; Marsh, "Suburbanization and the Search for Community," 103-4; Roger D. Simon, "The City-Building Process: Housing and Services in New Milwaukee Neighborhoods, 1880-1910," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Revised Edition, Vol. 86, Part 6, 1996 (Originally published Vol. 68, Part 5, 1978), 54. Studies of earlier outlying villages in Philadelphia or the suburbs that developed from them include the following: *Kensington: A City Within a City: An Historical and Industrial Review* (Philadelphia: Kneighton Printing House, 1891); Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1796* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Roger Miller and Joseph Siry, "The Emerging Suburb: West Philadelphia, 1850-1880," *Pennsylvania History* 47 (1980); Cynthia J. Shelton, *The Mills of Manayunk Industrialization and Conflict in the Philadelphia Region, 1787-1837* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); David Contosta, *Suburb in the City: Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, 1850-1990* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992); Harry C. Silcox, *A Place to Live and Work: The Henry Diston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
21. In 1898, the former Kingsessing Township became the southern part of Ward 40. The southern part of Ward 40, Eastwick, Southwest, and the Eastwick Urban Renewal Area are all roughly synonymous. In the late twentieth century, many Philadelphians still regarded this vicinity as peculiarly remote from center city. Discussing the Eastwick Redevelopment Project of the 1960s, Conrad Weiler, Jr., described Eastwick as "a huge, rural, marshy area in far Southwest Philadelphia" in *Philadelphia: Neighborhood, Authority, and the Urban Crisis* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 135.
22. Frederic M. Miller, Morris J. Vogel, and Allen F. Davis, *Philadelphia Stories: A Photographic History, 1920-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 26, noted that "Eastwick had been partially developed in the 1920s, when the area received its name." In the 1910s, the residents of the sixteen new subdivisions referred to the underdeveloped vicinity generally as "The Meadows," a name adopted around that time by the creators of the Meadows-Congregated Building and Loan Association. Residents continued to favor the name "The Meadows," a name one has penciled onto the pertinent census microfilm boxes in the Philadelphia branch of the Federal Archives. The disparity between the residents' attachment to "The Meadows" and 1950s politicians/planners' visions of "New Eastwick" is discussed in my dissertation (see note 2).



# **"FARMS DON'T PAY"**

23. "Rapid Rise in Values," *Record*, August 16, 1887, p. 1.
24. Advertisement for the *Sunday Press* in *Record*, April 20, 1889, Real Estate Page. In 1890, the *Sunday Press* claimed homebuilding offered a better return than any other investment; consequently, a number of Philadelphia businessmen successfully enriched themselves financing construction projects, "Philadelphia Is Fast Growing," *Sunday Press*, April 6, 1890. Newspapers are particularly informative because they served as the primary medium through which prospective purchasers learned about real estate for sale, rent, or exchange.
25. "West Philadelphia Building Sites," *Record*, October 5, 1889; "The North Wales Land Association," *Record*, July 18, 1887; "Wissinoming," *Record*, August 27, 1887. Many investors did not risk enumerating the benefits of country life until a house or two had been erected, undoubtedly anticipating that actual dwellings would offer proof that the tract would not remain too rural.
26. "The Real Estate Trust Company," *Record*, August 24, 1889.
27. "An Important Inquiry," *Record*, May 11, 1889, p. 6.
28. Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 129-30. Robert Sinclair has argued that when cities are expanding so that there is competition between urban and rural land uses, urban uses generally take over. Even anticipated urban use can create a significant difference in land value; "Von Thunen and Urban Sprawl," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 57 (1967).
29. Paul Glenn Munyon, "A Critical Review of Estimates of Net Income from Agriculture for 1880 and 1900: New Hampshire, a Case Study," *Journal of Economic History* 37 (1977): 634-54. Munyon also found that providing hay for urban horses accounted for an increase in farm revenue between 1880 and 1900.
30. "Farms Don't Pay," *Record*, March 3, 1890, p. 2. It is not clear from this article whether Burlington County farmers were or were not profiting from their labors. Burlington County, like Camden County, was within reasonable commuting distance to Philadelphia by the 1880s and was rapidly developing. The depreciation in land values could be in comparison to what that same land was worth to suburban land speculators and thus the depreciation was not a result of falling agricultural prices but the land speculation frenzy.
31. Help Wanted Column, *Record*, December 19, 1885.
32. See the John Frederick Lewis Papers, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library. Philadelphia maritime attorney Lewis purchased a country seat at Morstein, Chester County, around the turn of the century; many letters addressed to his farm manager reveal Lewis' disdain for his employee as well as farm workers, immigrants, and the urban working class in general.
33. "27<sup>th</sup> Ward," *Record*, November 7, 1885; "27 Acres," *Record*, November 21, 1885; "Capitalists and Land Associations," *Record*, December 12, 1885.
34. "A Chance for a Workingman," *Record*, February 2, 1886; "Look at This," *Record*, March 3, 1886; "Fern Rock Land Company," *Record*, March 29, 1887.
35. Phillips was associated with the Cherbourg Park Subdivision; Owens was part owner of both the Homeseekers tract and the Orchard Park subdivision. Information on Phillips and Owens was obtained from census manuscripts and subdivision plans. Owens' East Suffolk Driving Club is noted on the 1910 Bromley Atlas page for this vicinity. A few of the oldest former residents whom I have interviewed recalled the Owens racetrack and the brick 2-story hotel on his property above the Island Road and Tinicum Avenue junction.

36. "Rapid Rise in Values," *Record*, August 16, 1887, p. 1.
37. "Truck Farm, 8 Acres," *Record*, December 13, 1888; "45-Acre Farm, 43 Miles Out," *Record*, November 7, 1885.
38. The phrase "the old farm" appears in numerous subdivision advertisements in the 1880s and 1890s.
39. "Free Excursion," *Record*, May 26, 1888. Corbindale was renamed Lester when the piano manufacturer of that name purchased building lots and relocated to that subdivision. The Brognard farm became Rutledge (Delaware County) and the Soley property was located in Holmesburg (Ward 23).
40. "Ye Olden Tyme," *Record*, July 28, 1888. These advertisers described what they knew of the construction history of the farmhouse and even provided the dimensions of the three date stones. Elm is present day Narberth. This subdivision was financed by the Pennsylvania Railroad, although that corporation's name never appeared in the building lot advertisements.
41. "Narberth Park," *Record*, May 15, 1889.
42. "Chesilhurst's Growth," *Record*, March 30, 1887; "Chesilhurst Votes to Incorporate," *Record*, October 22, 1887. The transformation was accomplished legally, but as the figures from the advertisements indicate, the transformation of the actual landscape occurred much more slowly. The figures given here—100 built and 5,000 lots sold—accurately represent the ratio of houses built to lots sold in most subdivisions during this land boom. While many homebuilders purchased more than one lot for their dwelling, many lots were purchased by small-scale speculators. Chesilhurst was another Pennsylvania Railroad subdivision.
43. Contosta, *Suburb in the City*, notes the progressive-minded Chestnut Hill civic association "placed a premium on tidiness and order" (163). Several historians have examined the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century distinction between the idealized version of country and suburban life and actual rural life: Michael Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Images of Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 1994); John Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Significantly, the Overbrook Farms suburb in West Philadelphia, planned for what Margaret Marsh in *Suburban Lives* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990) defined as the "lower upper class," was the only subdivision in the Philadelphia metropolitan region to have the term "farm" in its name. On the socioeconomic ladder, these families were just a rung below those purchasing country seats; for them, "farm" was probably synonymous with "country gentleman's estate" and thus an inducement to purchase.
44. Based on information obtained from subdivision advertisements and scholars studying other cities (primarily Chicago), this ratio of lots sold to houses built is not unusual. Homer Hoyt, *One Hundred Years of Land Values in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933); Helen C. Monchow, "Population and Subdividing Activity in the Region of Chicago, 1817-1930," *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics* 9 (1933), 192-206; Philip H. Cornick, *Premature Subdivision and Its Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938). Gary R. Hovinen also concluded that small-scale speculators purchased most subdivision lots in eastern Delaware County adjacent to West & Southwest Philadelphia, in "Suburbanization in Greater Philadelphia, 1880-1941," *Journal of Historical Geography* 11 (1985), 174-95.
45. The 1890 census manuscript burned, so figures for this particular vicinity are unobtainable; I have not yet finished working with the 1930 census, although the number will probably be similar to

## "FARMS DON'T PAY"

1920. These totals reflect the number of household heads who owned/rented farms; other men are listed as farm laborers who worked for wages so, as in 1880, local farm employment still brought men to lower southwest Philadelphia.
46. Thanks to J. Ritchie Garrison, my dissertation advisor at the University of Delaware, for the information on pig and truck farming.
  47. Alice Boyd Ryback, Taped Oral Reminiscence, May 4, 2000. Ryback is the daughter of Josephine Goldhahn Brown Boyd.
  48. Isabel Doppler Foster and Nancy Doppler Melnick, Taped Oral Reminiscence, October 27, 1999; George Doppler, "The Roots of the Laughlin/Robinson/Russell/Doppler Families," an unpublished manuscript lent to me by Isabel Doppler Foster.
  49. Information on the Goldhahn family obtained from the census manuscripts for 1900, 1910, and 1920; Gopsill's Directory for 1885; issues of the *Goldhahn Family Newsletter* in the possession of Alice Boyd Ryback; and a taped interview with Ryback, May 4, 2000. Richard Goldhahn's purchase of three Elmwood lots was recorded in the *Philadelphia Record* in 1887.
  50. Edward McNulty, Taped Oral Reminiscence, May 8, 2000; Nicholas Saunders, Taped Oral Reminiscence, May 19, 2000.
  51. Larry Ryback, Taped Oral Reminiscence, May 4, 2000.
  52. Marie Cermak, Taped Oral Reminiscence, November 1, 1999.
  53. Contosta, *Suburb in the City*, 164. In Chapter 6, "Community Improvement: The Progressive Suburb," Contosta discussed the activities of the local civic association. The twelve issues of the *Clearview Messenger* for June 1925 through May 1926, lent to me by Becky Whelan Cafferky, closely followed and reported the activities of the Clearview Improvement Association. Almost every issue of the weekly *Southwest Chronicle* (1928-1934) discussed the goals and activities of the Greater Eastwick Improvement Association.

