George Woodward, Philadelphia Progressive

A n entrenched Republican political machine characterized early twentieth-century Philadelphia politics. Yet a handful of stubborn reformers in the city refused to give up their struggle against the Republican bosses, and they eventually won several victories against the spoilers, culminating with a new home rule charter in 1919.\(^1\) One of these determined crusaders was Dr. George Woodward (1863-1952), whose career as a reformer extended from the late 1890s to the early years of the Truman Administration.

The unusual length of Woodward’s reform efforts, in addition to several other factors, make him a candidate for careful study. His reform activities were especially varied, ranging from housing and municipal health to campaigns for more honest and efficient government. His training as a physician and his continuing identification with the medical profession also point to an important link between medicine and progressive reform. Just as significant were Woodward’s religious faith and his commitment to the social gospel. Finally, Woodward felt compelled to record his ideas and actions over the course of five decades, thereby providing unique insights into the survival of progressive ideas and initiatives long after the progressive era itself drew to a close at the end of World War I.\(^2\) Woodward’s twenty-eight years (1919-1947) in the Pennsylvania State Senate also show the intimate connection between urban reform and state politics.

Woodward was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, to one of the principal families in that part of the state. Originally from Connecticut, \(^1\) For an overview of corruption in Philadelphia during this time, see Arthur P. Dudden, “Lincoln Steffens’ Philadelphia,” Pennsylvania History 31 (1964), 449-58.

the family could boast of three colonial governors and a long line of local leaders. Woodward’s grandfather, George Washington Woodward, was a chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and was long remembered as a fierce Democrat and outspoken critic of Abraham Lincoln. His father, Stanley Woodward, was also a prominent Democrat and judge, winning wide respect throughout the Wyoming Valley as an effective local leader.

Secure in his family and social background, young George Woodward left for Yale College in the fall of 1883. After a year of postgraduate work at the Sheffield School, he entered the medical school at the University of Pennsylvania, earning his M.D. degree in 1891. After trying unsuccessfully to set up a practice in New Haven, Woodward settled in Philadelphia permanently—as a condition of his marriage to Gertrude Houston in 1894.  

3 Information about Woodward’s childhood, youth, and family origin may be found in
Woodward’s father-in-law was Henry Howard Houston, one of the wealthiest men in Philadelphia. A director of the Pennsylvania Railroad and a shrewd investor in numerous enterprises, Houston left over $14 million on his death in 1895.\(^4\) With one-third of the income from the Houston estate, the Woodwards were able to build “Krish-eim,” a thirty-room Tudor-Jacobean house in Chestnut Hill for themselves and their five children. They also supported numerous charities and around 1910 launched an extensive housing venture that continues to give their Philadelphia community much of its charm.

The Woodwards were devout Episcopalians, taking an active role in St. Martin-in-the-Fields Church, which Henry Howard Houston had built in 1889. George became a member of the vestry and was accounting warden for many years; Gertrude became a pillar of the Women’s Auxiliary and a generous contributor to missions both at home and abroad. And nothing pleased them more in later years than to spend several weeks each summer at religious conferences and retreats. The church itself was dedicated to the social gospel, maintaining a range of programs for the less fortunate, with over 40 percent of its annual income going to humanitarian or missionary programs. There was a large library in the church for anyone who cared to use it, and each summer the congregation sponsored week-long vacations for working girls at Buttercup Cottage on the edge of the Wissahickon woods. Many of Woodward’s activities as a reformer would be grounded in the kind of social gospel that was practiced regularly at St. Martin’s.\(^5\)

On a more personal level, Woodward was a tall and slender man who was often restless and easily bored. He loved to ride horseback
through the adjacent Wissahickon Valley and frequently joined Ger-
trude for an afternoon of canoeing on local streams. Some contem-
poraries also thought him something of an eccentric: gasoline cars
were "loud and smelly," he complained, leading him to drive old
electric models well into the 1940s. He also read with a kerosene
lamp until his death, and from his middle age he dressed in golf
knickers and long woolen stockings, wearing them virtually every-
where. He argued that they were more comfortable than long trousers,
and he was determined to wear them whatever others might say or
think.\footnote{Stanley Woodward, Sr., to author, April 29, 1986; interview with Elizabeth Gadsden
Woodward, Sept. 25, 1986.}

To some extent, Woodward's odd preferences stemmed from a
nostalgia for older ways. They also reflect the ambivalence that he
and so many other early twentieth-century reformers felt about the
modern, industrial world. While looking to the most recent discoveries
in science, medicine, and public administration for solutions to urban
problems, they could also demand a restoration of traditional values
or later lament the decline of states' rights in the face of a nationwide
economic emergency.

Although Woodward's mixed emotions about past and present were
quite typical of the progressive movement, there is no evidence that
he actually called himself a progressive. Yet his continuing belief that
modern urban society was in need of thoroughgoing reform places
him well within the broad contours of the movement. The multitude
of issues that he tackled likewise marked him as a progressive. Finally,
he belonged to a number of organizations in Philadelphia that have
been associated with the local progressive cause, including the In-
dependent and then Progressive Republicans of Germantown, the
Committee of Seventy, and the more temporary City party.

It was initially through medicine that Woodward became an active
reformer. What attracted him to medicine was the tremendous power
and respect that physicians had commanded in Wilkes-Barre. Yet he
had been frightened by some of the cases that he encountered during
internship and was further shaken when, as a young doctor in New
Haven, he misdiagnosed a serious illness. Nor did he attract much
business after he opened an office from his home in Chestnut Hill,
as most residents continued to prefer a well-established older doctor in the area. In 1897 he took down his shingle for good, admitting later in his *Memoirs* that he had clearly “chose[n] the wrong profession.”

Even after he had abandoned his practice, Woodward identified with the medical profession in many ways, signing himself “George Woodward, M.D.” for the rest of his life. He continued to admire the best physicians for their successful blend of humanitarianism and science. Indeed, one of his great heroes was Sir William Osler, who had taught him at the University of Pennsylvania and who later had gone on to Johns Hopkins where he led a campaign to rid Baltimore of typhoid fever.

Like Osler, Woodward was now determined to become “a laboratory man of science.” He worked for a while at the University of Pennsylvania’s newly built William Pepper Laboratory, doing research on milk and eventually publishing two papers about it. Then, on the recommendation of an older medical friend, the mayor appointed him to the Philadelphia Board of Health in 1897.

Although he could not know it, the thirty-four-year-old Woodward was about to launch his half-century career as a reformer. His motives were rooted in religious belief, but they also derived from his faith in science and modern efficiency. Seemingly oblivious to the potential contradictions between these sources of authority, it was enough for him to believe that what he did was “right.” In his *Memoirs* and other extensive writings, Woodward never confessed to any doubts about his reform career. Above all, Woodward was a self-confident man who had great faith in his own actions and beliefs.

Woodward’s self-confidence became evident soon after he took his seat on the Board of Health. With great energy and determination, he took up the problem of typhoid fever. Up to 1,000 Philadelphians

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were dying of the disease annually, and Woodward was sure that a prime cause of typhoid was the city’s water supply, most of which was drawn from the polluted Schuylkill River. He convinced fellow board members to test the water, borrowed a launch from the Fairmount Park Commission, and, with the board’s chemist and bacteriologist, took samples from every “sewer and privy discharging into the river” all the way to Reading. The three took numerous photographs with which to document their case. In October 1897 they published their results in a 116-page pamphlet, bound in “bright yellow paper,” and distributed thousands of them to journalists, politicians, and interested citizens. Citing the experience of many European cities, they recommended filtration plants to purify Philadelphia’s water.

Mayor Samuel Ashbridge was furious at the board for embarrassing his administration, and he proceeded to have the state legislature abolish the Board of Health, replacing it with a bureau that was more amenable to his control. But public indignation prevented the mayor from avoiding the filtration question. In September 1899 the two Philadelphia City Councils authorized the first plants. Unfortunately, the facilities were installed in stages; not until March 1909 was the entire water supply being purified. No more typhoid epidemics broke out after 1909, thanks in large part to George Woodward’s tenacity.

Woodward’s early reform efforts focused on a thorough investigation and dissemination of the facts. Mayor Ashbridge’s reaction to his typhoid campaign made Woodward realize that reformers also needed to attack the political machine directly in order to solve public health and other problems in the long run.

Woodward was among the reformers who succeeded in overthrowing the city machine in 1905. At this time the Republican orga-

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10 Woodward, Memoirs, 36.


nization was run by state Insurance Commissioner Israel Durham who, with his loyal assistants, had turned out the vote year after year. They insured large Republican victories through massive election frauds that included bribery at the polls, multiple voting, and the stuffing of ballot boxes. Durham and his machine amassed huge campaign chests by assessing city employees; in 1903 they collected over $349,000 in this way. They also raised large sums by awarding contracts for construction projects and city services to favored companies in return for generous kickbacks, meanwhile avoiding competitive bidding and accepting shoddy work. One result was a tremendous waste of city funds, amounting in one estimate to over $5 million a year.¹³

The minority Democrats had no chance whatever of winning municipal elections, and many of the Democratic leaders were actually in the pay of the Republican machine. Woodward himself was still a Democrat when he settled in Philadelphia, having accepted his family's political allegiance as a young man, but strategic considerations now led him to abandon the hopeless Philadelphia "Democracy." Over the next decade he participated in several third-party reform movements, eventually becoming what he called an "independent Republican."

Woodward's first real experiences with reform politics on the municipal level came in 1904, when the city's large vote for Theodore Roosevelt excited Philadelphia reformers and revived the movement for better local government. Since 1891 most of the reformers had belonged to the Municipal League, now moribund by years of failure and ridicule from the press. In mid-November the League called a citizens' meeting at the Bourse, where the assembled crowd heard fiery denunciations of the machine. At an even larger meeting a month later, reformers decided to create a new organization, the Committee of Seventy. George Woodward was among the seven men chosen to serve on its executive board.¹⁴

Within weeks the Committee organized an independent City party and entered candidates for the elections in February 1905, when Philadelphians would go to the polls to choose councilmen and city magistrates. With the support of Edwin Van Valkenburg’s crusading *North American* and several other independent newspapers like the *Press* and *Public Ledger*, the City party focused its efforts on wards where reform sentiment was strongest. The City party lost, but the candidates nonetheless made a respectable showing against the machine. The local clergy then came to their aid, forming a city-wide ministerial association for better government and holding prayer meetings to enlist the hosts of heaven in their battle.

The machine made a fatal mistake when Durham asked the city councils to give the United Gas Improvement Company a seventy-five-year lease on the municipal gas works. In return, the city would receive $25 million for various construction projects, far less than would have been made from annual rents over the same period. It was also clear to the reformers that much of the $25 million would end up as graft. Mass rallies and protests forced the councils to abandon the gas bill while Mayor John Weaver was pressured into joining the reformers. Voting lists were purged of fraudulent names; those who had tampered with them were tried and sent to jail. In November 1905 the reform candidates won a resounding victory.15

Woodward worked hard for the City party all that year, soliciting campaign contributions and speaking on behalf of its candidates. He also wrote a glowing report of their victory for the December 2 issue of *Outlook* magazine, which underlined the moral underpinnings of his own commitment to political reform. Special police were sent to guard the polls, he reported, and they made numerous arrests. “The patrol-wagons brought . . . load after load of prisoners, and, driving into the courtyard of the City Hall, discharging their loads into the cells amid the cheering, hooting, and howling of a mob of citizens delighted that the tables had been turned upon the old, arrogant ‘gang.’”16 Their victory that night unleashed the spirit of an old-fashioned revival meeting, Woodward wrote, as “triumphant citizens”

15 Abernethy, “Progressivism,” 540-43.
marched through the streets singing "Onward Christian Soldiers." In his conclusion Woodward himself fell under the evangelical spell: "The invincible 'Organization' has been shattered by the uprising of the plain people," he exulted. "David has slain Goliath. Elijah has called upon the God of Israel, and the priests of Baal are slain."[17]

The momentum of reform carried over into early 1906 when Boies Penrose, the Republican boss of Pennsylvania, finally agreed to convene a special session of the state legislature to consider several bills urged by the reformers. Legislation was passed that mandated personal registration of voters (in place of lists drawn up by the parties), required uniform primaries for city and county offices, and forbade solicitations among municipal employees. In addition, a corrupt practices act directed candidates to file reports on campaign contributions and expenditures.

Unfortunately, this legislation gave many reformers a false sense of security, and their momentum collapsed as the months passed. Mayor Weaver deserted the reformers when the City party refused to endorse him for the governorship; most of the election reforms went unenforced; and the machine easily won the mayoral office in 1907.[18]

Woodward was not one to give up easily or abandon his evangelical fervor, but for the time being he would change tactics, quietly concentrating on the more practical or scientific side of municipal problems. In 1908 he organized and largely financed the Bureau of Municipal Research, modeled on a similar organization in New York City. With a staff of specialists the Bureau collected data on specific municipal problems, published their results, and made recommendations to the city government—all the while maintaining a non-partisan stance. One of its early investigations revealed that many goods sold in Philadelphia were inaccurately counted or weighed, and its revelations resulted in a Bureau of Weights and Measures, created in 1913. The Bureau of Municipal Research also persuaded the city to adopt promotion examinations for employees, prepared modern accounting techniques for city departments, compiled a digest of

[17] Ibid.
municipal health ordinances, and revised the city's police manual.\textsuperscript{19} Such individual initiatives were well received in Philadelphia, an especially "private city" according to Sam Bass Warner, which has never taken kindly to public programs, comprehensive planning, or regulation of any sort.\textsuperscript{20}

In the meantime, reform sentiment continued throughout the nation. Some of its fervor helped to rejuvenate the Philadelphia reformers, who scored a victory over the machine in 1911 when they elected as mayor Rudolph Blankenburg, a long-time municipal reformer of German descent, who was nicknamed "Old Dutch Cleanser." Woodward supported the reform ticket, and he was greatly pleased with Blankenburg's victory.\textsuperscript{21}

The year 1912 brought the three-cornered presidential campaign of Woodrow Wilson, William Howard Taft, and Theodore Roosevelt, but Woodward did not join most of the local reformers in supporting Roosevelt. By 1912 he had begun to appreciate the inherent weakness of temporary parties and resented Roosevelt's division of Republican ranks. And as later remarks showed, he mistrusted strong executives like Roosevelt, believing that power should rest with the legislature. He accordingly voted for Taft, never quite forgiving Roosevelt for Wilson's victory that year.\textsuperscript{22}

Outside the political arena, Woodward was increasingly concerned about the quality of housing in his adopted city. Actually, Philadelphia was better off than other major cities when it came to housing, and it was known even then as "the city of homes." Not hemmed in by water (like Boston and New York), it had been able to expand to the north, west, and south, providing relatively cheap land and resulting in few high-rise tenements. Yet there were plenty of dilapidated dwellings, particularly in the river wards south and east of city hall. There, tiny "band boxes" had been built in dreary alleyways or on crowded back lots. Many were without indoor plumbing, with


\textsuperscript{22} Stanley Woodward, Sr., to author, March 19, 1986.
some 61,000 properties in 1903 served by backyard privies—a dangerous source of typhoid fever and other infectious diseases.\textsuperscript{23}

Woodward's experiences with the Board of Health and the Bureau of Municipal Research doubtless made him keenly aware of the housing problem, a concern that also ranked high in the minds of many other progressives throughout the nation. For them, cramped and unsanitary dwellings were not only a source of disease but a breeding ground of crime and social discontent. Progressives also continued to share the nineteenth-century belief that the home should be an attractive moral sanctuary, where the family could overcome the evils and stresses of modern life through a devotion to traditional, middle-class values. Such sentiments moved well-to-do women in particular to visit the slums in an attempt to disseminate their own values and, in so doing, to rescue the poor from their miseries. Realizing that sporadic visits were not enough, some reform-minded individuals decided to establish settlement houses in the slums where they could live among the disadvantaged and be a more permanent source of instruction and example for their unfortunate neighbors.\textsuperscript{24}

Among those dedicated to finding housing for the working poor was Philadelphia’s Octavia Hill Association, a group that also accorded well with Philadelphia’s tradition of private initiative. Woodward joined the group in the early twentieth century.

The Association had been founded in 1896 by several women of the Civic Club. It was inspired by and modeled on the work of Octavia Hill in London, a Christian socialist who had persuaded John Ruskin and others to buy run-down houses, renovate them, and rent them to working-class families at low rates. Miss Hill also wanted to instill middle-class values in her tenants, insisting that they pay their rent on time and refrain from “immoral” behavior. She used a system of “friendly rent collectors” to give advice and enforce discipline among residents.

Under the direction of Helen Parrish, the Octavia Hill Association


of Philadelphia adopted most of the ideas worked out in the London experiment, including the friendly rent collectors. They purchased whole blocks of houses, many of them in South Philadelphia, renovated them, and rented them at low rates. All were wired for electricity and equipped with indoor toilets and water supplies. The Association was particularly successful in combining small yards and alleyways into sunny courtyards for all the tenants to enjoy.25

Woodward was an enthusiastic director of the Association from the beginning. He built a model tenement for them at the corner of Seventh and Catherine Streets in the heart of South Philadelphia’s Italian section, naming it the Casa Ravello. Woodward maintained ownership of the building, but the Association managed it and collected the rents. Casa Ravello was a four-story brick structure containing 30 six-room apartments, designed in an obvious Italianate style, with shops on the ground floor enframed in large rounded arches. On the floors above were balconies overlooking the street. Above these balconies, on the large roof, was a playground for the children, where the Association ran a summer school in July and August. A clinic was located in a corner of the ground floor. Mothers could bring their babies for examinations and receive advice on child care. Two doctors kept regular office hours and nurses visited homes in the neighborhoods.26

Neither the Casa Ravello nor the Octavia Hill Association’s efforts on behalf of the working poor reached the truly destitute. Woodward was moved to do something for these unfortunates. In 1912, at the suggestion of evangelist George Long, he built a seven-story cement shelter on the 1000 block of Locust Street—an area then known as “Hell’s Half Acre.” He called it “Inasmuch Mission,” from the verse in St. Matthew, “Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these you have done it unto Me.” His son Stanley remembered the mission well: “the price of an overnight room with clean bed was 25 cents, but the lodger was required to take a shower and was

26 Waldo, Good Housing That Pays, 33-34.
given a pair of cotton pajamas. If the poor man didn’t have 25 cents, he was given credit and taken in anyway.27

Indigent and abused children were yet another group that received Woodward’s attention. In 1904 he organized and financed the Child Labor Association of Pennsylvania, an organization that campaigned to establish anti-child labor laws which finally cleared the Pennsylvania legislature in 1915. From 1913 to 1927 he was president of the Children’s Aid Society, a group that raised money to buy clothing and food as well as to provide medical care for the children of impoverished families. In the years ahead he would give land and equipment for parks and playgrounds in several areas of the city.28

Woodward’s interest in better housing also extended to his own Chestnut Hill. Here he applied many of the ideas and experiences that he had acquired through the Octavia Hill Association. His building plans for Chestnut Hill were an extension in some ways of housing developments that Woodward’s father-in-law, Henry Houston, had established in the area a generation before. In the late 1870s and early 1880s Houston had purchased large tracts of land on the west side of Chestnut Hill, where he created a model suburb clustering along the commuter rail line (which he had persuaded the Pennsylvania Railroad to build in 1882). Shortly thereafter Houston erected the rambling Wissahickon Inn as a summer retreat for prosperous Philadelphians, and across the street he donated land to the Philadelphia Cricket Club in order to lure them to the Hill. Next to the club he built Saint Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church. Then he commissioned a huge turreted residence for himself called Druim Moir (Great Crag). And on the streets around the Wissahickon Heights Station, he constructed about 100 houses, all of them rendered in local stone and most designed in a late Queen Anne style. In order to determine who lived in the neighborhood, Houston rented rather than sold most of the dwellings.29

29 John J. MacFarlane, History of Early Chestnut Hill (Philadelphia, 1927), 18-21; S.F. Hotchkin, Ancient and Modern Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill (Philadelphia,
About 1910 George and Gertrude Woodward decided to continue Houston's building projects, which had come to a halt with the patriarch's death in 1895. According to Woodward's *Memoirs*, their original intention was to build attractive, low-cost housing for workers on the east side of Chestnut Hill. But the plan was sabotaged as middle-class residents leased them, in Woodward's words, "before we discovered the working people."

In fact, many working-class families lived in Chestnut Hill. The east side was home to scores of quarriers, bricklayers, chauffeurs, and domestic servants, many of whom would have been interested in Woodward's new houses. The only mystery is why he did not seek them out. Woodward himself gives a partial answer in his *Memoirs*, describing his middle-class tenants as "exactly the people who pay their bills, and seldom complain. Dependable, self respecting, and quite unexciting, these are now famous as the forgotten men of . . . Professor W.G. Sumner of Yale." In the last analysis, he might have believed that such tenants would prove more dependable than their working-class neighbors. Perhaps, too, he supposed that he had already done enough in South Philadelphia through his contributions to the Octavia Hill Association. But beyond such explanations, Woodward and his contemporaries saw nothing wrong with separating classes into distinct sections of the city. The west side of Chestnut Hill was already an upper-middle-class preserve; George Woodward and his neighbors expected to keep it that way.

Between 1910 and 1934 Woodward erected about 180 additional dwellings in Chestnut Hill. Like the earlier Houston houses, nearly all were constructed of local stone, and together the two sets of houses gave Chestnut Hill a texture and flavor that have made it one of the most attractive suburbs in the country. But unlike Houston's Queen Anne structures, Woodward's residences were rendered in English or Anglo-Norman styles, ranging from the Cotswold cottages around

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Ibid.
Pastorius Park to the Tudor-Jacobean quadruple houses on Benezet Street and the French Village in West Mount Airy. Virtually all these properties were planted with the kinds of trees and shrubs that could be found in the nearby Wissahickon gorge, thus making the whole west side of Chestnut Hill look as if it were an extension of the forest below—a purposeful application of the romantic’s faith in the restorative powers of nature, however contrived. Nearly all of Woodward’s houses were designed by H. Louis Durhing, Edmund Gilchrist, and Robert Rodes McGowin.32

In an intriguing extension of the Octavia Hill Association’s belief in low rents, Woodward expected only a 6 percent return on his

original investment. His houses rented at well below market values, with most of them being leased to upper-middle-class families who were generally Episcopalian in faith and Republican in politics.

Woodward was proud of his houses in Chestnut Hill and wrote articles about them for the *Architectural Record* and *The Survey* magazine. These articles reveal that Woodward saw the housing developments as part of his larger efforts to solve urban problems. His houses would provide a safe, healthy, and attractive retreat from the perils of city life, a haven where successful parents could pass on values and habits that might insure their children’s own social and economic well-being. Woodward also hoped that his example in Chestnut Hill would provide a model for other developers, including those who might adapt it for working-class housing.

Woodward’s Chestnut Hill development represented a combination of his moral and scientific approach to reform. He believed that beautiful housing could soothe and uplift its occupants. Such beauty had to be planned, however, by a developer who could use his control over a sizeable area to create clusters of attractive homes that were landscaped appropriately. By renting most of the dwellings, he could also insure that the houses were well cared for by families who appreciated what he had done.

Woodward might have spent the rest of his life looking after his growing real estate domain in Chestnut Hill, but in 1918 he was approached by the Independent Republicans of Germantown to run for the Pennsylvania State Senate. Although he was fifty-five years old, Woodward’s success that November marked the beginning of twenty-eight years and seven successive terms in the upper house at Harrisburg.

Woodward remained interested in many of the same issues as before, but now that he had a place in government, he concentrated even more on the need for efficient and honest administration. His political office gave him a greater public platform than ever. From the late 1910s to his retirement three decades later, Woodward’s

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name was constantly in the press, making him one of the best-known politicians in the entire state. The years at Harrisburg would also reveal the limits of Woodward’s progressivism. This was especially true during the 1930s when he became a vocal critic of the New Deal.

Woodward’s swearing-in for the 1919 legislative session created something of a sensation when he appeared in the senate chamber dressed in his golf knickers and woolen knee socks. He delighted the crowd even more when he vaulted over a brass rail following the ceremony and then dropped into his seat with legs dangling over the chair arm. Whether amused or irritated, Woodward’s colleagues in the senate soon learned that he was a serious legislator.

It was soon evident, for instance, that Woodward would use his position in the senate to champion a series of proposals for better government in Philadelphia, many of which required special legislation at the state level. His proposals would also reflect his often random mix of moral and scientific principles.

The first of Woodward’s proposals was for a new home-rule charter in Philadelphia. Woodward agreed with other Philadelphia reformers that the old “Bullet” Charter of 1885 was woefully insufficient, and he eagerly joined a movement to give the city a new frame of government. Above all, Woodward and the others contended that the large and unwieldy bicameral city councils (known as the Common and Select Councils) of 146 elected members had to be altered. Organizing such a large assembly virtually required some sort of boss rule, making it impossible for the reformers to capture and control it. In addition, the machine’s numerous seats on the council gave it a continuous source of patronage, as councilmen awarded generous payments to the private contractors who provided most of the city’s services.

A movement to reform the councils, as well as many other features of Philadelphia government, was introduced at a large dinner on December 13, 1918, where Woodward was named to a subcommittee

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(headed by veteran reformer John C. Winston) to prepare a framework for city government.\textsuperscript{37} The committee enlisted the help of Woodward's Bureau of Municipal Research, and completed most of its work by the spring of 1919. Senator Woodward then guided the charter through the upper chamber in Harrisburg, an effort that later earned him the name "father of the 1919 charter."\textsuperscript{38}

The most important feature of the 1919 charter gave Philadelphia a smaller unicameral council with twenty-one members, one for each of the state senatorial districts and one additional member for every 20,000 voters. This way local machines could not gerrymander councilmanic districts, while the smaller numbers of councilmen would not be, in theory, so dependent on the bosses for organization and direction. Council members would hold office for four years and receive $5,000 in annual salary. They were prohibited from holding any other public office simultaneously—a provision that did not exist under the former charter. The city could also pave and repair its own streets and collect its own garbage, thus eliminating some of the kickbacks and political favors to privileged contractors. About 15,000 municipal employees came under civil service, with appointees chosen from the top two candidates on the eligibility lists, while policemen and firemen were forbidden to make political contributions or engage in political activities. All city offices now had to submit their finances to the controller, and the mayor had to provide an annual budget for the council which then held public hearings on it. The Department of Welfare coordinated social welfare agencies and their activities.\textsuperscript{39}

Woodward and the reformers did not get all they had wanted in the charter; only experience would reveal if the machine would succeed in counteracting charter prohibitions. Woodward would spend a considerable part of his three decades at Harrisburg trying to win further reforms in Philadelphia's government while defending the progress that had already been made. And like a good progressive, he would continue to campaign for honesty, greater efficiency, and

\textsuperscript{37} Public Ledger, Dec. 14, 1918.
\textsuperscript{38} Evening Bulletin, May 26, 1952.
\textsuperscript{39} Abernethy, "Progressivism," 564-65. See also Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Passed at the Legislative Session of 1919, 581-638.
essentially non-partisan solutions to problems that arose in city administration.

Woodward also campaigned against what he saw as schemes to defraud local taxpayers. One of these involved city proposals to buy the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company (PRT). He asserted that the citizens were being made to pay far too much for a run-down and mismanaged system. Woodward particularly objected to a requirement that Philadelphia buy the whole system and introduced his own bill that allowed the city to purchase separate segments of the transit combine.\textsuperscript{40} His “any or all” provision passed both houses of the legislature, but the city finally bought the entire PRT in 1934 for what Woodward thought the outrageous sum of $84.5 million.

Woodward’s opposition to the PRT elicited one of his strongest moral rebukes. Reminding the public that the excessive cost would be borne by generations to come, he urged taxpayers not to condemn their children for the sins of the PRT. “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them,” he warned in adopting the First Commandment, “For I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me.”\textsuperscript{41} Woodward’s admonitions fell on deaf ears. The city bought the system and renamed it the Philadelphia Transportation Company (PTC).

Woodward approached many other urban problems, however, out of a consideration for scientific efficiency. By the early 1930s he especially wanted to abolish the dual city-county government that had plagued Philadelphia since the partial merger of the two units in 1854. The merger had made the boundaries of the city and county coterminous, but it had left all the city and county offices intact, resulting in a wasteful and confusing duplication of effort—not to speak of the greater opportunities for patronage and graft. The so-called county row offices, consisting of the treasurer, auditor, recorder, and some eight others, for example, were completely beyond the control of the mayor or city council. With some 1,800 jobs at their disposal, they were a rich source of political jobbery and patronage for the local machine.

\textsuperscript{40} Evening Bulletin, Jan. 15, March 26, April 4, 1929.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., May 20, 1936.
Because the structure of county government was mandated by the state constitution, Woodward proposed a constitutional amendment in the spring of 1931 to merge the city of Philadelphia into the county and greatly simplify the governing machinery. At the head of the newly consolidated unit would be three well-paid commissioners whose generous salaries would attract qualified men to the office. They would establish policy but hire an expert manager to administer the government on a daily basis. This arrangement would save the taxpayers millions of dollars while eliminating most of the partisan posturing from government. With a vivid image of how the new apparatus would operate, Woodward asked Philadelphians to “visualize a small round table in a pleasant room, . . . with four men seated comfortably around it. There every day without any legislative pomp and circumstance and speech making and playing to the gallery, these four skillful men [the three commissioners and their manager] will discuss the affairs of Philadelphia. Wise conclusions will be swiftly reached with the minimum of lost motion. Such is the picture of how to do it well and with the least cost and delay.”

Under Woodward’s merger plan there would be no mayor and no city council. Since the government would be administered by a well-paid, non-partisan expert, there was also no need of a civil service department. The Philadelphia machine was strongly opposed to the plan, as were numerous state Republicans who feared that the Woodward plan would weaken their organization in Philadelphia. Woodward was the only member of the Senate Judiciary Committee to vote for the amendment, and it died as the 1931 session came to an end. He proposed similar schemes for city-county consolidation in 1933 and 1939; they, too, went down to defeat.  

Likewise in the thirties, Woodward began recommending a plan to merge Philadelphia County into a larger administrative district that would include nearby Bucks, Montgomery, Delaware, and Chester Counties. The merger would eliminate a wasteful duplication of services, save money, and permit the entire region to coordinate its approach to transportation and other problems that overlapped bound-

42 Ibid., May 2, 1931. See also ibid., April 22 and May 8, 1931.
43 Ibid., Dec. 6, 1931, Jan. 22, 1933, and Nov. 11, 1939.
aries and were common to all. Woodward petitioned the legislature several times on behalf of the plan, but no action was taken.44

More successful was Woodward’s proposal to raise additional revenue for Philadelphia through a tax to be levied against all income earned in the city—whether the recipient lived within the municipal boundaries or not. Woodward drew up the necessary legislation, guided the tax bill through the senate, and in November 1938 the Philadelphia City Council levied a 1½ percent income tax, the first of its kind in the country. The percentages rose in the years ahead, but the tax would help to keep the municipality solvent even after thousands of citizens joined the nationwide stampede to the suburbs in the post-World War II period.45

Woodward’s continuing campaigns to reform Philadelphia city government coincided with the first issues of his The Pennsylvania Legislator, a leaflet that he “published every so often” for the edification of fellow legislators or for anyone who cared to read it. Each number was printed on heavy blue paper that was folded over twice to make a cover page and three pages of text. It eventually reached a circulation of around 1,100, with copies going to the press and interested constituents, as well as to Harrisburg legislators. The Philadelphia newspapers quoted liberally from it, and the Evening Bulletin usually carried it verbatim. After the end of each legislative session, Woodward collected the leaflets together and published them as a single volume, retaining the title The Pennsylvania Legislator. Bound in dark green with a gold seal of the state of Pennsylvania stamped on the front cover, seven such volumes appeared between 1932 and 1945.

The avowed purpose of The Pennsylvania Legislator was an extension of Woodward’s old idea that good government depended upon a dispassionate examination of the facts, and in this regard it harked back to his days at the Board of Health and the Bureau of Municipal Research. His little “bulletin,” as he called it, would consider “the major issues in an impersonal manner,” giving “the facts to the men who have the votes, to knowingly represent their constituents and the people of Pennsylvania.” “Real representative government,” he continued, “requires the representative to be equipped with facts and

44 Ibid., Jan. 24, 1933; Public Ledger, Feb. 7, 1933.
to make up his own mind and not have it made up for him by interested parties." Legislators with all the facts, he was sure, would no longer be swayed "by mere public opinion and prejudice." The first issues of *The Pennsylvania Legislator* were indeed filled with all sorts of facts and figures. As the months passed, however, Woodward increasingly slipped into personal and partisan rhetoric, along with slashing attacks on what he considered to be immoral propositions. As if to mirror his entire career as a reformer, *The Pennsylvania Legislator* was often a contradictory amalgam of Woodward’s alternatingly moral and empirical approach to the world around him.

Whatever its shortcomings, *The Pennsylvania Legislator* always made for interesting reading, and fifty years later it still gives fruitful insights into the workings of Pennsylvania state government. At the time it also enhanced Woodward’s power and reputation, assuring him regular access to press and public alike. Fellow senators never knew when they might become the target of his pungent wit or the subject for one of his withering political farces that even now make the reader chuckle. Some of Woodward’s other attacks took the form of parables or sharply etched allegories that drew liberally on his wide knowledge of the Bible, medicine, and secular literature.

The first numbers of *The Pennsylvania Legislator* coincided with a deepening economic depression. By April 1931 over 15 percent of Philadelphia’s workforce was unemployed; statewide, the figure was even higher and reached a disastrous 37.1 percent by the winter of 1933. At the same time, industrial production fell to half the 1929 level. Bituminous coal production declined from 144 to 75 million tons over the same period, while pig iron output plummeted from 14 million to only 2 million tons. Per capita income, which stood at $775 in 1929, was down to $421 in 1933.

Woodward was disheartened by what had happened, referring again and again to 1931 as “this year of our disgrace.” On one level his response to the depression was essentially moral and emotional. Ever the philanthropist, he contributed over $100,000 to the Philadelphia

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relief drive headed by Horatio Gates Lloyd. In January 1931 Woodward had put up $5,000 to hire unemployed men to cut down hundreds of blighted and dead chestnut trees along the Wissahickon Valley next to Krisheim. The felled trees were split into firewood and given to charitable groups for dispersal to the needy, or for sale in order to support relief projects.

Woodward was so pleased with the results of his work project that he urged the state of Pennsylvania to establish an "industrial army" to perform similarly useful tasks throughout the commonwealth. The unemployed could enlist for six months at a time, would be fed and housed in camps, and would do such things as clearing land and constructing sewers, public buildings, and water systems. Workers would receive $30 per month in addition to board and room. The idea was not adopted in Pennsylvania, but a very similar arrangement became the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) under the New Deal.

Woodward knew that private contributions to relief were not enough. He called upon the state to act and challenged other wealthy men and women to contribute their fair share. When some refused or contributed only grudgingly, Woodward became indignant. It infuriated him to read in the newspaper that wealthy New Yorkers had displayed over $2 million worth of clothing and jewelry at the opening of the Metropolitan Opera in 1931, while the unemployed huddled on park benches throughout the city. "Norman Thomas," he advised, "ought to stage a bread line in the shadow . . . of the Metropolitan" to dramatize the callousness of its well-healed patrons.

If nothing else, he added, the nation's wealthy should give money in order to prevent a socialist revolution, a prospect that had haunted some progressives like Woodward since early in the century. Instead, Woodward complained, the millionaires gloat that they have earned their money and "believe that many unemployed are either defectives or plain bums." Unable to face the truth, these wealthy cowards had

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50 Ibid., Nov. 17, 1931.
51 The Pennsylvania Legislator, 1, 128.
fled south where they sunned themselves after breakfast "with yesterday's newspaper full of the excitement of the starving proletariat rioting at home," the unsavory news only increasing "the serenity of [their] morning game of golf."\textsuperscript{52}

Because these unfeeling and selfish men would not contribute for the relief of the suffering, Woodward believed that the state would have to tax them. "The strong arm of the law," he advised, "must take the selfish rich man by the seat of his golf plus fours and shake the money out of his pockets."\textsuperscript{53} He recommended a graduated state income tax and was undeterred when he learned that the Pennsylvania constitution would have to be amended to allow for differential rates. A flat 2 percent rate, he proposed, would soon arouse public opinion and force the constitutional amendment.\textsuperscript{54}

On a less emotional level, Woodward thought that the state could and should find ways to help large cities like Philadelphia with their financial woes, pointing out in \textit{The Pennsylvania Legislator} that the state of New York had given New York City over $83 million in 1929, compared to the mere $3.8 million that Harrisburg had doled out to Philadelphia during the same period.\textsuperscript{55} He also believed that a number of functions performed by local government should be turned over to the state, experience having convinced him that there were "many holes . . . in the old armor of local self-government." It was evident to him that state highways were better than township roads or that a state-mandated school curriculum was plainly superior to "the good old days of the little red school house."\textsuperscript{56} Officials at the higher levels of government were likewise better than local magistrates—at least as a general rule—for only the former were paid enough to attract well-trained and capable men. Most of all, citizens should remember that government was "a science and the practice of government an art."\textsuperscript{57}

The emergency of depression clearly led Woodward to assign more tasks to government than his political philosophy would have allowed

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 129.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 130.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Evening Bulletin}, Nov. 2, 3, 9, 1931.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{The Pennsylvania Legislator}, I, 154.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 190, 192.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 194.
in the early decades of the century, but there were limits beyond which he would not go. He generally balked at programs that seemed to violate his belief in economical, scientific, and non-partisan government, or that threatened to transform government into a paternalistic welfare state.

In 1931, for example, Woodward came out against an old-age pension bill that had been introduced in the Pennsylvania legislature. "Open the door to old age pensions," he warned, "and you open it to unemployment insurance and health insurance. . . . Highway and school costs are inevitable. Welfare costs must be debated. . . . It is the case of Straight Thinking vs. Emotionalism." His stands against pensions proved highly unpopular among spokesmen for the elderly. Abraham Epstein, national secretary of the American Association for Old Age Security, denounced Woodward by name, while about fifty pickets protested outside his office at the Girard Trust Building in Philadelphia, and police had to be called to disperse them. Demonstrators also invaded the grounds at Krisheim and were arrested by the local police.

During these early days of the depression Woodward also turned completely against Governor Gifford Pinchot. A wealthy progressive like Woodward, Pinchot lived on a large and attractive estate at Milford, Pennsylvania. Woodward had known Pinchot at Yale and had applauded his triumphs as chief forester under Theodore Roosevelt. He also had supported Pinchot's first successful run for governor in 1922. But relations between them soured when Pinchot coopted the recommendations of a committee that Woodward had chaired on state government reorganization and then dubbed it the "Pinchot Plan."

Pinchot's re-election in 1930 led to even more ill feeling between the two progressive Republicans. Woodward freely admitted that Pinchot was often right on the issues, but he resented what he saw as the governor's imperious attitude toward the legislature. In one of

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58 Ibid., 67-68.
his comic lines from *The Pennsylvania Legislator*, he likened the governor to a modern movie producer with "a talky film which he has projected for us several times." On another occasion he compared Pinchot to Alice's Queen of Hearts who runs around shouting to the legislators, "Off with their heads!" Later he called him a would-be Louis XIV who wanted to change the state motto to "L'Etate c'est moi" and wondered if the sage of Milford had not spent too much time reading Machiavelli.61

This open break with Pinchot stemmed in part from the clash of two strong-willed men, but Woodward sincerely believed in legislative supremacy and feared powerful executives at all levels of government. For him, it was a simple issue of right versus wrong. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that he became an outspoken critic of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, joining a number of other progressives who turned against an administration that ironically fought for many of their old causes.

To begin with, Woodward believed that a number of New Deal measures were unconstitutional, and he bitterly resented pressure from Washington to pass state legislation that was necessary to implement such federal programs as Social Security. He wrote that the central government had been "organized as a necessary condition for these United States. It was not organized to function as a high powered, wasteful institution of philanthropy."62 He went on to invoke the residual powers clause of the 10th Amendment in defense of states' rights, convinced that Thomas Jefferson and the other founders would have opposed federal aid to the states. "Let us all become stand-patters on state sovereignty," he implored his fellow legislators.63

Even more serious was what Woodward considered the New Deal's unscientific approach to solving the depression, a common objection among progressives who had spent their lives urging rational organization and greater efficiency in government.64 In *The Pennsylvania Legislator* Woodward complained that the country was "now witnessing a series of laboratory experiments of trial and error fostered

61 *Evening Bulletin*, March 5 and 20, Nov. 13, 1933.
63 Ibid., 128.
by after-luncheon declarations pleasing to the company gathered around the table with the coffee and cigarettes, but quite disastrous to the hard world of office hours and balanced budgets.\textsuperscript{65}

Nor did the New Dealers share Woodward’s horror of blatant partisanship. Instead, insisted Woodward, Roosevelt had used the new government programs to create the greatest patronage machine in American history. More alarming, this army of welfare workers threatened to assure Roosevelt an unprecedented third term, accompanied by a dangerous expansion of executive authority.\textsuperscript{66}

Such fears did not blind Woodward to all New Deal accomplishments. He applauded many of Roosevelt’s early measures for economic recovery, as well as his freedom from the sort of hesitation that had thwarted President Herbert Hoover’s efforts against unemployment. And he had nothing but praise for the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Democrats’ answer to his own “industrial army.” The CCC had cost the taxpayers plenty of money, he admitted, “but we do have something to show for [it].”\textsuperscript{67} Roosevelt’s chastisements of dishonest bankers and stock manipulators also appealed to Woodward’s moral sense. As he put it in The Pennsylvania Legislator, “A long overdue spanking has been meted out to the bad side of Wall Street.”\textsuperscript{68}

Woodward’s indictment of the New Deal was thus selective, making it difficult for the observer to determine just what criteria he used for his criticisms. Roosevelt’s violations of states’ rights and non-partisanship, combined with this trial-and-error approach to reform, posed major obstacles for Woodward. Beyond these were his worries that the New Deal would completely undermine the private initiative that he and most other Philadelphia reformers had long cherished. A good example is provided by Woodward’s attitude toward public housing.

He had been interested in better housing all his life. During the 1910s and 1920s he had attended annual meetings of the National Conference on Housing, and in the early 1930s he was one of forty-

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{65} The Pennsylvania Legislator, III (Philadelphia, 1936), 104.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 114-15, 148.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 164.
three directors for the Regional Planning Federation of the Philadelphia Tri-State District. But both of these organizations looked largely to private initiative to provide better and more attractive housing.

Even so, Woodward was curious enough about public housing in the late 1930s to visit Philadelphia's Hill Creek project near the corner of Adams Avenue and the Roosevelt Boulevard. His first impulse was to applaud. "There was a warm sun shining on the well designed brick buildings," he reported cheerfully in The Pennsylvania Legislator. "There were happy children playing and bright flowers blooming. Here, indeed, was a good deed in a naughty world." Yet he could not help but notice the somewhat less attractive but solidly built row houses just across the street. Was it fair, he asked himself, for their hard-working and thrifty owners to be taxed for the sake of their less pecuniary neighbors now ensconced in subsidized housing?

Woodward could not break entirely from the "private city's" continuing belief in individual initiative, or from his own insistence that hard work and thrift were essential virtues.

The end of World War II coincided with Woodward's decision to step down from the Pennsylvania State Senate. By then he was not only the oldest member of the senate but also enjoyed the longest consecutive service in the chamber, a distinction that had entitled him to seat number one for many years. He gave no official reason for retiring, but at age eighty-three he was concerned that his health might not see him through another term. His only public regret was not being able to stay in the legislature "until city-county consolidation has been accomplished."

Although he was now out of public office, Woodward was not about to abandon all political activity. In early 1947 he was made chairman of a new Charter Commission in Philadelphia. The eventual result was a new city charter, approved by the voters in April

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70 The Pennsylvania Legislator, V (Philadelphia, 1941), 231.
71 Ibid.
74 Ibid., March 3 and 5, 1947.
1951 and put into operation the following year. While it did not abolish the dual city-county government altogether, several of the county "row offices" were disbanded or merged with city departments.\(^{75}\) The municipal civil service was overhauled: A stronger merit system was installed, the city council was stripped of all appointive power, and a new civil service commission was created. There would also be a managing director who presided over the ten service departments (e.g., police, fire, recreation, health, and welfare). The position was not identical to Woodward's city manager, but it was similar in concept. Finally, the charter elevated the office of mayor, giving him the authority to veto council legislation along with wide authority to appoint and remove members of his administration.\(^{76}\) Woodward must have been quite pleased with the charter as a whole.

Woodward himself did not live long enough to pass judgment on city government under the new charter. He died of kidney failure on May 25, 1951, following several months of illness that had confined him to bed at Krisheim. His continuing battles for municipal reform had remained consistent with the views of other moderate progressives at the beginning of the century. His efforts had been unusually varied and constructive, touching nearly every area of progressive concern from housing and municipal health to child labor and home rule. He was also much more articulate about his actions than most aging progressives, thereby providing scholars with an almost uninterrupted verbal and intellectual connection between his campaign for filtered water in Philadelphia at the end of the nineteenth century and his efforts on behalf of charter reform in the late 1940s. A consideration of George Woodward's life demonstrates that progressive ideas continued to work their leaven well into the second half of the twentieth century. The mixture of moral and scientific criteria that Woodward applied throughout his life also points to

\(^{75}\) An annotation to Section 1102 of the *Philadelphia Home Rule Charter of 1951* reads, "subsection (2) looks forward to City County consolidation Wherever possible each new board and commission to be created is to be attached to a city department" See the *Philadelphia Home Rule Charter* (Philadelphia, 1951), 5

\(^{76}\) For a brief discussion of the 1951 charter, see Joseph S. Clark, Jr., and Dennis J Clark, "Rally and Relapse, 1946-1968," in Wengley, ed., *Philadelphia A 300 Year History*, 650-57
contradictions within the progressive movement that neither Woodward nor most of his fellow reformers fully understood, or resolved.

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