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*Philadelphia's  
"Miniature Williamsburg":  
The Colonial Revival and  
Germantown's Market Square*

FROM THE MOMENT THAT THE PROJECT became public, Colonial Williamsburg fired the imagination of historic preservationists and inspired numerous so-called restorations all over the country. One of these projects, which supporters consistently described in correspondence and promotional materials as a "miniature Williamsburg," unfolded on the old Market Square in the Germantown section of Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> Begun just after World War II, this effort in Germantown represented the culmination of a local colonial revival movement that had started in earnest around 1900. Although the Market Square undertaking was never completed and was ultimately abandoned in the mid-1970s, this project offers some intriguing

<sup>1</sup> The term "miniature Williamsburg," in describing the Market Square project, was in use from the very beginning. For example, William W. Adam, a board member of the Germantown Historical Society, wrote on Aug. 19, 1948, to Otis W. Balis, treasurer of the Germantown Community Council, "We feel that this neighborhood will greatly benefit by restoring Market Square to resemble a miniature Williamsburg. . . ." Stradley Papers, Germantown Historical Society (hereafter, GHS).

insights into the ways in which history can be distorted to serve present purposes and into the essentially romantic and antiurban biases of the colonial revival movement in Germantown—and elsewhere.

The nearly thirty-year effort on Market Square, located in the heart of old Germantown along Germantown Avenue, was officially launched in 1948 by the Germantown Historical Society and was assumed a decade later by a group of businessmen and civic leaders who organized themselves as Colonial Germantown, Inc. Their Market Square project was not a true restoration, although its supporters consistently used this term to describe their activities. A true restoration was impossible because none of the colonial structures on Market Square had survived into the mid-twentieth century. To carry out their plan the Market Square organizers had to reconstruct several buildings from old drawings or late-nineteenth-century photographs. In several cases there were no records, visual or otherwise, of the buildings that had stood on or near the square during the colonial period, which forced the planners to adopt conjectural designs or to propose “colonial style” facades for several nineteenth-century buildings. Included in this latter category was a Gothic-Romanesque Presbyterian church facing the square.

The various supporters of the Market Square project did not view the absence of authentic colonial architecture on the square as a serious problem, since it was the creation of a “colonial atmosphere,” rather than colonial authenticity, that commanded their interest throughout the entire life of the project. Standing in their way, however, were the descendants of local Civil War veterans, supported by other veterans’ organizations in the area, who adamantly opposed dismantling or moving a Civil War monument in the center of the square. The Presbyterian congregation proved equally unmovable by refusing to demolish their house of worship and to replace it at great expense with an entirely conjectural building in the colonial style. By the early 1970s serious physical deterioration in Germantown and the removal of most of its more prosperous residents to suburban areas made any continuation of the project unfeasible from a financial point of view. By then it was also clear that competition from the more famous historical attractions in downtown Philadelphia, and elsewhere in the region, would never allow Market Square to become a significant tourist center. Meanwhile, mounting criticism from professional historians, who faulted local leaders for their emotional and often inaccurate views of the past, meant that Germantown’s miniature Williamsburg could not expect to receive support from the city, state, or federal governments. The persistence of those involved in the

Market Square project, despite the many obstacles, is a testament not only to their dedication and tenacity but also to an emotional view of the past that allowed them to resist or to discount nearly all criticism.

Despite the problems with the Market Square project, Germantown had its historical attractions: there were numerous physical remains of the colonial past, from dozens of prerevolutionary buildings to the town's main street itself (Germantown Avenue). Germantown's participation in the Revolutionary War and the brief presence of such heroic figures as George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette provided local inhabitants with dramatic events around which to focus their revival efforts. A number of well-to-do local residents could trace their American roots back to the colonial period—in Germantown or elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> During the first half of the twentieth century, Germantown also continued to be home to many men and women who enjoyed the wealth, self-confidence, and professional skills to found and maintain historical and preservation societies and to undertake a variety of programs and fundraising events.

Of great importance, then, was Germantown's own colonial past, combined with a continuing consciousness of local history, however distorted it might be. Located approximately six miles northwest of downtown Philadelphia, Germantown was originally part of the 5,700 acres that William Penn had sold in 1683 to two German groups.<sup>3</sup> Both groups then united under the leadership of Francis Daniel Pastorius, who would come to be revered as the "founder of Germantown." Although the great majority of the early settlers were from German-speaking lands, there were English families in Germantown almost from the start. Within a century, intermarriage among English and German residents—and the broader assimilation of the German population—erased most traces of German culture in the community.

By the mid-eighteenth century Germantown could be described as a strip

<sup>2</sup> This ability in Philadelphia to base much of its colonial revival on the many genuine remains of a colonial past, as well as upon the memories and traditions of its colonial families, is discussed by Edward Teitelman and Betsy Fahlman, "Wilson Eyre and the Colonial Revival in Philadelphia," in Alan Axelrod, ed., *The Colonial Revival in America* (New York, 1985), 71-76.

<sup>3</sup> The most professional and extensively researched history of early Germantown is Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800* (Princeton, 1976). Also helpful in understanding this period are Harry M. Tinkcom, Margaret B. Tinkcom, and Grant Miles Simon, *Historic Germantown from the Founding to the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century: A Survey of the German Township* (Philadelphia, 1955) and Edward W. Hocker, *Germantown, 1683-1933* (Philadelphia, 1933).

village, with houses and shops fronting along the Germantown Road (later Germantown Avenue), then a main highway connecting Philadelphia to its vast agricultural hinterland north and west of the city. Most of the early residents were craftsmen and shopkeepers. Just beyond the town were farms whose owners made purchases in Germantown or brought their produce, including livestock, into the village for processing (i.e., butchering and tanning) or for shipment to Philadelphia's markets. A number of streams in the area, which ran downhill toward Philadelphia, provided Germantown with excellent mill sites for grinding grain, sawing wood, and making paper. Thus from the very beginning Germantown was a center of industry and merchandising, a fact that advocates of the later colonial revival, who were reacting against the problems of an urban, industrial society, would largely overlook.

Far more impressive for later generations was the fact that the Battle of Germantown had been fought there on October 4, 1777. Almost as important was the brief residence of President George Washington during the fall of 1793. A deadly yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia had forced the entire United States government to remove itself to Germantown, where high ground had rendered the community safe from the disease. Washington and wife Martha came back to Germantown in the summer of 1794 in order to escape the heat of Philadelphia. The last great event connected to these glory days was the return of the Marquis de Lafayette to Germantown on July 20, 1825, near the end of his year-long tour of the United States.

Between 1691 and 1707 Germantown had existed as an independent borough in Philadelphia County, with its own courts and government. Its borough status was rescinded, however, after numerous conflicts with the colonial government. Germantown was governed by the county of Philadelphia until 1844 when it again obtained a borough charter. This second period of home rule was also short-lived, for in 1854 the Pennsylvania state legislature passed a bill consolidating the original city of Philadelphia, some two square miles in extent, with Philadelphia County. This city-county consolidation created a huge metropolitan domain of 129 square miles. Swept into the consolidated city were dozens of towns and villages, several of which, like Germantown, had been partly or wholly independent up to this point in their histories.

Most Germantowners seem to have been against the consolidation (as were the residents of many other towns and villages of Philadelphia County), but the legislature, then heavily influenced by the city of Philadelphia, passed

the law with little heed to public opinion in the outlying districts.<sup>4</sup> Officially, Germantown was now part of Philadelphia. Yet residents continued to think of themselves as Germantowners and listed their addresses as Germantown, Philadelphia (or even Germantown, Pennsylvania) for decades to come. Assisting in this perpetuation of a strong local identity was the fact that the old German Township, which had surrounded Germantown and of which Germantown had been a part, now became Philadelphia's 22d Ward and in the process conveyed a sense of political solidarity among Germantowners and their neighbors in the former German Township.

During the half century before the city-county consolidation of 1854, Germantown had become something of a summer resort area, as prosperous Philadelphians followed the example of President Washington by spending their summers "in the country" at Germantown. Some built large country houses (a tradition which long predated the Washington visits of 1793 and 1794), while others stayed at boardinghouses or hotels constructed especially for the summer trade. When Germantown was linked by rail to Philadelphia in 1832, the old town became the first railroad suburb in the region—and perhaps in the entire United States. By the Civil War there were dozens of Victorian villas west of Germantown Avenue, many of them overlooking the fields and woodlands which continued to surround the town on the north and west. The arrival of a second commuter rail line in 1884 only accelerated the process, although by then Germantown was a suburb within Philadelphia's municipal limits.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, industries and workers' housing had come to concentrate on the east side of town, which bordered even more industrialized North Philadelphia. Factories in the Germantown area included the huge Glen Echo textile mills and several other textile manufacturers. In 1881 the Reading Railroad constructed a vast freight yard at Wayne Junction, on the southern boundary of Germantown, which attracted even more plants to the area. Among them were Midvale Steel, where Frederick W. Taylor would carry out his famous time-and-motion studies.<sup>6</sup> By 1900 the old German

<sup>4</sup> For an example of this local opposition, see the *Germantown Telegraph*, Feb. 12, 1851.

<sup>5</sup> On this phenomenon, see David R. Contosta, *Suburb in the City: Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, 1850-1990* (Columbus, Ohio, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800-1885* (Philadelphia, 1985), 225-41; Harold E. Spaulding, "Germantown," in *Workshop of the World* (Wallingford, Pa., 1990), chap. 3; *Germantown Crier* (hereafter, *Crier*) 35 (1982-83), 13-15.

Township could boast a population of about 70,000 people.<sup>7</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, then, Germantown was a complex community, containing impressive country houses, suburban neighborhoods, busy factories, and a thriving commercial spine along Germantown Avenue, causing local boosters to call it a "city within a city."<sup>8</sup> But because it was some distance from the center of Philadelphia and because its growth had been slow but steady, many remnants of the colonial past had survived. Indeed, it was probably the contrast between Germantown's country houses, suburban villas, and simple but attractive eighteenth-century structures on the one hand, and its gritty industrial section on the other that made well-to-do residents so sensitive to what they saw as the less attractive side of industrialization and urbanization. The increasing disappearance of open land as new suburban neighborhoods and working-class housing were developed in Germantown also alarmed the same men and women.<sup>9</sup>

Yet Germantown was by any definition a thriving community in 1900, with much attractive housing, leading one to conjecture that those who pined for the colonial past were reacting against a more general discomfort with modern America. It was a discomfort shared by numerous native-born, middle- and upper-class Americans at the time who were frightened by labor unrest, the growth of urban slums, the rise of mass immigration, and the sheer ugliness of certain industrial sites along with the monotony of workers' housing associated with them. Finally, an often powerful sense of loss gripped many long-time residents of Germantown—and of other communities throughout the nation—as rapid changes wiped out familiar sights and sounds.

According to cultural historian Michael Kammen, many such Americans romanticized the past in their search for permanent values and symbols that they could hold up as a counterpoise to a confusing and disconcerting

<sup>7</sup> Initial letter of invitation, Germantown and Chestnut Hill Improvement Association, December 1900, Community Improvement Associations file, GHS.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> On this subject see Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1986* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 85-114, and William B. Rhoads, "The Colonial Revival and the Americanization of Immigrants," in Axelrod, *Colonial Revival in America*, 341-61. Such attitudes among Germantown's upper classes are expressed in a number of papers read before the Site and Relic Society of Germantown, collected and published as *Germantown History* (Philadelphia, 1915) and in many of the writings by Cornelius Weygandt, Jr., cited in notes 28, 29.

present. At the same time they mourned the passing of earlier times.<sup>10</sup> For some, who found even their religious faith challenged by the findings of science, the worship of a past golden age, complete with physical relics and secular saints, brought considerable solace. This reverence for a semisacred past was increasingly organized by local preservation societies, who marked buildings and sponsored pilgrimages to hallowed sites.<sup>11</sup>

Tellingly, the name of Germantown's first ambitious preservation organization, founded in the late autumn of 1900, was the Site and Relic Society (renamed the Germantown Historical Society in 1927).<sup>12</sup> The majority of its founders could trace their ancestry back to the colonial period. These included Daniel Pastorius Bruner, a descendant of Germantown's own founder, Francis Daniel Pastorius; Mary J. Brown (Mrs. Samuel Chew), whose husband's family had owned Cliveden (where the Chews continued to live in 1900) at the time of the Battle of Germantown; Charles Wolcott Henry, whose ancestor Oliver Wolcott was a signer of the Declaration of Independence; Ellison Perot Morris, a member of an old Germantown family, who lived in the eighteenth-century house on Germantown Avenue (now known as the Deshler-Morris House), where Washington had stayed in 1793 and 1794; Charles Jones Wister, the first president of the Site and Relic Society and the owner of Grumblethorpe, one of Germantown's finest colonial houses, which had been in the family since it was built in 1744; and Cornelius Weygandt, Sr., a descendant of Johannes Bechtel, who had settled in Germantown in 1726 and who was the first pastor of what later became the Market Square Presbyterian Church.<sup>13</sup>

Even those early officers and founders of the Site and Relic Society who could not trace their lineage to colonial Germantown were members of what E. Digby Baltzell has called the Protestant Establishment.<sup>14</sup> Whether

<sup>10</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991), 194-296.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-202.

<sup>12</sup> Histories of the Site and Relic Society and its continuation as the Germantown Historical Society may be found in Hocker, *Germantown*, 277, and the *Crier* 1 (1949), 19-21; 42 (1989-90), 4-10; 43 (1991), 76-79. See also the *Germantown Independent-Gazette*, Oct. 11, 1923. Even before the founding of the Site and Relic Society in 1900, there were what can be called colonial revival efforts in Germantown. These are discussed in David R. Contosta, "Salvation Through the Past: The Colonial Revival in Germantown," *Crier* 43 (1991), 88-95.

<sup>13</sup> This list is taken from the *Crier* 42 (1989-90), 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America* (New York, 1964).

"old-family Germantowners" or not, the society's founders worked in prestigious occupations. Among them were two lawyers, two bank presidents, an insurance company executive, a corporate executive, a publisher, and a clergyman. Several other men seem to have lived on inherited wealth, while none of the four female founders was gainfully employed. Although the names and faces would change over the years, the officers of the Site and Relic Society (and later of the Germantown Historical Society) would share nearly identical backgrounds for decades to come. During its first forty years, for example, all seven of its presidents were listed in either the *Philadelphia Blue Book* or the *Social Register*.<sup>15</sup>

During its early decades the Site and Relic Society sponsored a number of activities and programs that called attention to Germantown's colonial past, and as such helped to prepare the way for Germantown's most ambitious colonial revival project several decades later on Market Square. These included placing tablets and other markers on significant buildings, collecting and displaying artifacts, publishing articles, newsletters, and guidebooks, sponsoring lectures and discussions, and holding commemorations of past events, the most important being the Battle of Germantown each October.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike many historical societies and historically minded civic groups in the early twentieth century, which sought to connect past and present as a way of dramatizing the progress that had occurred over the years, those who spoke for the Site and Relic Society consistently insisted that the colonial past was somehow superior to the present.<sup>17</sup> In this sense their view of the local past reflected the values and interests of Germantown's upper classes, who felt most threatened by changing times. Their interpretation of the colonial period thus represents what historian John Bodnar has called a "special interest" in the past.<sup>18</sup> In time, this upper-class tradition would be challenged by other interests in Germantown, especially during the Market Square "restoration."

Reflecting the more genteel view of Germantown's colonial era were the

<sup>15</sup> *Philadelphia Blue Book*, 1905; *Philadelphia Social Register*, 1900, 1922, 1931, 1940; *Crier* 42 (1989-90), 7-8; 43 (1990), 76-79.

<sup>16</sup> Such activities are chronicled in the early board minutes of the Site and Relic Society, now housed at the Germantown Historical Society.

<sup>17</sup> On this point, see David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1990), 52-72, 105-122.

<sup>18</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 1992), 14.

drawings of Joseph Pennell (1857-1926), who had spent part of his childhood in Germantown.<sup>19</sup> Pennell's work received a glowing review in an October 1912 address before the Site and Relic Society entitled "The Artists of Germantown" by member Herbert Welsh (1851-1941).<sup>20</sup> After heaping high praise on Gilbert Stuart, who had lived and painted in Germantown between 1796 and 1805, Welsh turned to other local artists, ending his article with a discussion of Pennell. What the speaker admired most about Pennell was his ability to create dreamy views of buildings and streets that transported the viewer from all the supposed ugliness of urban life. He "lifts us and carries us away on the steady pinion of a trained imagination, out of dusky shadows, past the cathedral spire, or the monstrous rectangular office building of the modern American world, away beyond the floating clouds and into the airy realm of space, the land of dreams and joy."<sup>21</sup> A half century later critics of Germantown's efforts at historical preservation would charge that Pennell's dream-like renderings of Germantown street scenes were the precise image that local restorers were trying to reproduce on Market Square (fig. 1).

Long before such criticisms, the historical pageants and tableaux staged in Germantown during the first decades of the twentieth century endeavored to convey pretty pictures of the colonial past similar to those of Joseph Pennell, albeit in three dimensions, with real people dressed up in colonial garb. There were, for example, pageants and tableaux at the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Germantown in 1927 and again at the 250th anniversary of the founding of Germantown in 1933. For the 1933 event, held in concert with the annual battle commemoration during the first week in October, visitors could experience a series of historical vignettes as they moved from one site to another. At each they viewed men and women in colonial dress going about activities thought to be typical of the day (fig. 2). In the opinion of a writer for the *Public Ledger*, those who had embarked on this historic Germantown tour were none other than urban pilgrims in quest of beauty and repose. "It was a strange search," the reporter opined, "one for

<sup>19</sup> Louise Strawbridge, "Joseph Pennell: Germantown Rejected," *Crier* 40 (1988), 84-88. See also *Crier* 2 (1950), 22-23.

<sup>20</sup> Welsh was a much-admired Quaker reformer who crusaded against Philadelphia's corrupt Republican machine, but he is best remembered as the founder of the Indian Rights Association in 1882. See *Crier* 8 (1956), 15; 12 (1960), 14-15.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert Welsh, "The Artists of Germantown," in *Germantown History*, 247.

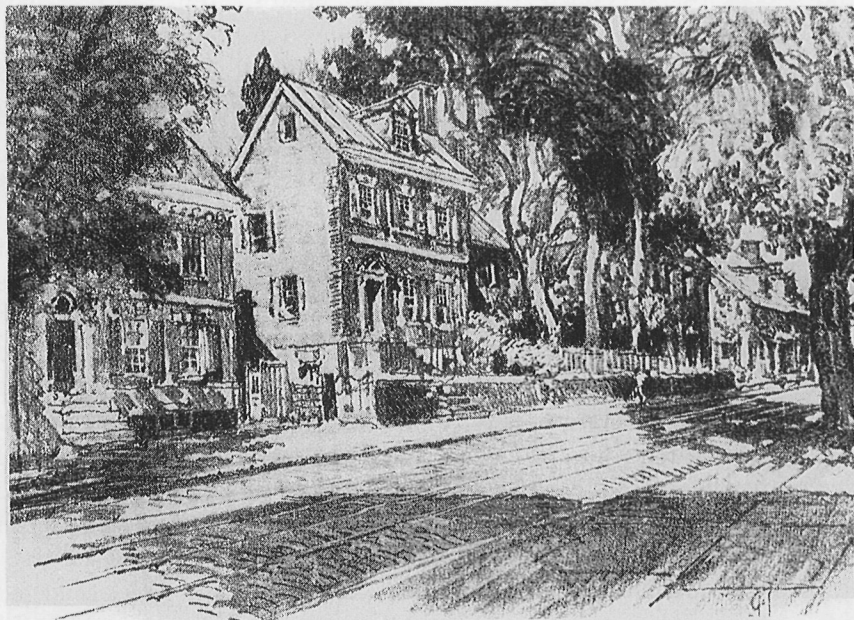


Fig. 1. Joseph Pennell, "Main Street, Germantown," a rendering of the 5200 block of Germantown Avenue, early twentieth century. From Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *Our Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1914), 89.

jewels in the rush of modern business."<sup>22</sup> In happy contrast to the harsh sights and sounds of the present day, there were the many surviving colonial churches, schools, and homes that had thrown open their doors for the modern visitor. In the estimation of the *Ledger* reporter,

all these [buildings had] a beauty of their own; a beauty soft, compelling, peaceful, exuding some strange spiritual quality that we of modern times can never hope to grasp. . . . [E]ach step . . . is one of caress on some holy ground. Ground hallowed by the tread of many feet; of souls in search of peace and beauty. . . . The day wanes; and dusk is born. Our guide seems weary, but content in the knowledge [that] the past can never die.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to these historical commemorations and pageants, several

<sup>22</sup> *Public Ledger*, Oct. 5, 1927.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Germantown authors offered idyllic visions of the colonial past. Among such authors was the poet and playwright Francis Howard Williams (1845-1922). A resident of Germantown, Williams could trace his ancestry back to a Quaker immigrant who had sailed to Philadelphia in 1682 on William Penn's ship the *Welcome*. For many years Williams was himself president of the Welcome Society (Pennsylvania's equivalent to New England's Mayflower Society). Williams also wrote the lyrics for an elaborate historical pageant in 1912, held in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park, to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>24</sup> In October 1907 he read a poem before the Site and Relic Society entitled "A Backward Vision and a Forward Glance," which hailed local patriotism during the Battle of Germantown:



Fig. 2. Local dignitaries during the 175th anniversary of the Battle of Germantown, October 1952. Courtesy of Germantown Historical Society.

<sup>24</sup> *Who's Who in Pennsylvania* (New York, 1904), 797; Jane Campbell, Scrapbooks, XLIV, 196, GHS; Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*, 211-12.

We stand to-day upon the sacred soil  
 Trodden of patriot feet when war's alarms  
 Flung their rude summons on the ears of toil  
 From far across the brown and sunlit farms;  
 And still there seems an echo in the air  
 Of Musgrave's volleys and the iron roar  
 Of Conway's guns pounding their answer there  
 On window barred and barricaded door;  
 And still the roadways of the startled town  
 Seem bright with bayonets, glinting in the sun,  
 And still we hear the horsemen charging down,  
 Obedient to the word of Washington.<sup>25</sup>

The poem tells nothing of the pain and death of battle, of the terrible uncertainties of the Revolution, of the fact that Germantown was home to a good many Quaker pacifists, or that Washington's army was defeated at Germantown and forced to retreat to winter quarters at Valley Forge. Nor was there any mention in the poem (or in any of the publications generated by the Site and Relic Society) that Benjamin Chew, former chief justice of colonial Pennsylvania and the owner of Cliveden, was a suspected loyalist—or that his daughters were outspoken supporters of the British cause.<sup>26</sup>

Another local writer who romanticized the colonial past, though he was a generation younger than Williams, was Cornelius Weygandt, Jr. (1872-1957). Weygandt was a frequent contributor to the publications of the Germantown Historical Society, the descendent of an eighteenth-century Germantown family, and the son of Cornelius Weygandt, Sr., who was a founder of the Site and Relic Society.<sup>27</sup> The younger Weygandt was the author of numerous books and a longtime professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. He lived all his eighty-five years in or around Germantown. In his *Philadelphia Folks* (1938) he wrote,

<sup>25</sup> Francis Howard Williams, "A Backward Vision and a Forward Glance," in *Germantown History*, 98.

<sup>26</sup> Hocker, *Germantown*, 121-22. A widespread tendency to distort the revolutionary past is explored in great depth by Michael Kammen, *Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (New York, 1978).

<sup>27</sup> *Crier* 3 (1951), 7-9, 28; 9 (1957), 26.

We like to feel that we are very like our colonial ancestors. . . . We have houses that are two hundred years old, and we reproduce them for our homes in building operations in town and out. . . . We hang on to our forebears' treasures, to Savery highboys, and to Randolph chairs, to Peale paintings and to Strickland prints, to Syng silver and to Tucker china.<sup>28</sup>

For Weygandt, the antique furnishings of his own cottage-like house in Mount Airy (immediately northwest of Germantown) were almost sacred icons that comforted him amidst allegedly declining times. In his autobiography, *On the Edge of Evening* (1946), Weygandt explained,

Our house harbors old furniture, much of it come down in my family or milady's, a chest of drawers of crotch walnut, a Chippendale chair in mahogany, a high chest of drawers inlaid with tulips, slat-back chairs, a Sheraton sofa, old china made in England for the Pennsylvania market. . . . Little house and little place tell of the taste and interests of their occupants and make a safe retreat from the ugliness fast pressing in on all sides from a deteriorating world.<sup>29</sup>

According to Weygandt and the other local admirers of colonial times, the eighteenth century had been a period of beauty, honesty, hard work, patriotism, and community spirit. Such romantic assertions of a golden age were revealing precursors to the Market Square project.

There can be little doubt that the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, which had begun in the late 1920s, was a compelling model for the Market Square undertaking. As early as August 1948, for example, Leighton Stradley (1880-1956), then president of the Germantown Historical Society, wrote to a local merchant that the society was "endeavoring to put over a program to restore Market Square and give it a colonial atmosphere somewhat after the Williamsburg model," an image that he would use repeatedly

<sup>28</sup> Cornelius Weygandt, *Philadelphia Folks: Ways and Institutions in and about the Quaker City* (New York, 1938), xi.

<sup>29</sup> Weygandt, *On the Edge of Evening: An Autobiography of One Who Holds with the Old Ways* (New York, 1946), 204. Weygandt insisted upon the superiority of past customs in several other books. In addition to *Philadelphia Folks*, noted above, these are *A Passing America: Considerations of Things of Yesterday Fast Fading from Our World* (New York, 1932); *The Dutch Country: Folks and Treasures in the Red Hills of Pennsylvania* (New York, 1939); and *The Plenty of Pennsylvania: Samples of Seven Cultures Persisting from Colonial Days* (New York, 1942).

in correspondence over the next few years.<sup>30</sup>

Also revealing is the persistent myth, still accepted by many residents of northwest Philadelphia as the twentieth century comes to an end, that John D. Rockefeller, Jr., had thought of restoring Germantown even before he decided to underwrite Colonial Williamsburg. Although there are several variants of this myth, virtually all the accounts hold that Rockefeller was spurned by a selfish and unimaginative citizenry who did not want Germantown to be disturbed by an ambitious restoration project.<sup>31</sup> Although histories of the Williamsburg restoration deal extensively with Rockefeller's other historic preservation activities (and the endless requests for funds), not one mentions Germantown. The fact is that Rockefeller was only slowly brought around to the idea of restoring Williamsburg through the painstaking efforts of Dr. William Goodwin. It is unlikely, therefore, that Rockefeller made a spontaneous approach to Germantown at an even earlier date or, indeed, at any time.<sup>32</sup>

The myth seems to have arisen out of some scanty correspondence with Colonial Williamsburg and the Rockefeller Foundation and a great deal of wishful thinking. If this is the case, the saga probably began in early 1931 when a board member of the Germantown Historical Society received a letter from a member of the Williamsburg restoration staff asking if there were any records in the society's collection that might help Dr. Goodwin to research the colonial and revolutionary periods. The letter also mentioned that the Williamsburg project was proceeding rapidly under the largess of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.<sup>33</sup> There is nothing more about Rockefeller in the society's records until the board minutes of June 18, 1942. At that time the

<sup>30</sup> Leighton Stradley to Carl W. Fenninger, Aug. 3, 1948, Stradley Papers, GHS. Slightly different phrasing appeared in the letter Stradley wrote to the Rev. Ellsworth Erskine Jackson, minister of the Market Square Presbyterian Church, on Aug. 10, 1948: "The Germantown Historical Society is planning to submit to the citizens of Germantown a project for the restoration of Market Square as it was in colonial times, somewhat according to the Williamsburg formula." In this same letter Stradley went on to mention the important role that the Bruton Church had played in the Williamsburg restoration and suggested that the Market Square Presbyterian might occupy a similarly important niche in Germantown's Market Square "restoration." Stradley Papers, GHS.

<sup>31</sup> I am indebted to Lisabeth M. Holloway, former librarian and archivist of the Germantown Historical Society, for sharing this oral tradition about Rockefeller's alleged interest in Germantown.

<sup>32</sup> See Raymond B. Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: A Portrait* (New York, 1956), 272-301; Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949* (2 vols., Charlottesville, Va., 1981), 1:11-73.

<sup>33</sup> Hiram H. Shenk to J. C. Ferguson, March 19, 1931, GHS.

board voted to approach Rockefeller about the possibility of a loan to purchase a property at 5140 Germantown Avenue (then threatened with demolition), which had once contained the studio of artist Gilbert Stuart and where Stuart was believed to have painted the famous "unfinished" portrait of Washington.<sup>34</sup> The following day the chairman of the board forwarded the request to Rockefeller.<sup>35</sup> Revealingly, there was no reference in this letter to Rockefeller's supposed interest in Germantown some years before. In any case, Rockefeller was not interested and declined the request.<sup>36</sup> As to the Gilbert Stuart house, it was torn down a year later, in 1943.

Despite the tenuousness of these communications with Colonial Williamsburg and then with Rockefeller himself, a full-blown myth about Rockefeller's alleged desire to restore Germantown at an early date was widely accepted in the community by 1948 when the Market Square project was launched. In December of that year E. Y. Allen, of the 22d Ward Planning Committee, and William Hord, of the Germantown Community Council (a coalition of local civic groups), made inquiries to the Rockefeller Foundation about the supposed Rockefeller connection to Germantown. Allen's inquiry came in the form of a telephone call that was summarized in a memorandum by a Rockefeller staff member. According to the memorandum, Allen had called to say, "He understood that before the Rockefellers undertook a restoration of Williamsburg they had made quite a thorough study of Germantown with a possible view to restoring it." Allen went on to request access to any materials that had been generated during the reputed study.<sup>37</sup> The inquiry by Hord, on behalf of the Germantown Community Council, took the form of a letter to Rockefeller. According to Hord's account, Rockefeller's interest in Germantown had arisen *during* rather than before the Williamsburg undertaking. In Hord's words, Rockefeller had "investigated the possibility of a restoration project here [in Germantown] at the same time as the Williamsburg project." Like Allen,

<sup>34</sup> Board Minutes, GHS, June 18, 1942; Historian's Report, GHS, 1942-43; Tinkcom et al., *Historic Germantown*, 45.

<sup>35</sup> J. Mitchell Elliot to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., June 19, 1942, GHS.

<sup>36</sup> Erwin Levold, archivist, Rockefeller Archives Center, telephone interview by author, April 9, 1996; Rockefeller staff to Elliot, June 24, 1942. According to the accession card at the Rockefeller Archive Center, the copy of the letter of refusal was "destroyed." Nor could the original letter of refusal be found in the archives of the Germantown Historical Society.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum to Files, Restorations, Dec. 16, 1948, Rockefeller Family Archives, Record Group 2 (OMR), Cultural Interest Series, box 137, folder 1202, Rockefeller Archives Center.

Hord closed by asking Rockefeller to share any plans that had been generated about Germantown.<sup>38</sup>

The Rockefeller staff was clearly mystified by the Allen and Hord queries. In the words of an internal memorandum composed by staff of the Rockefeller Foundation (the main points of which were probably communicated to Allen in a return telephone call), "There is nothing in general files to show that an investigation was ever made of the possibility of a restoration project in the Germantown area."<sup>39</sup> Nor, according to the memorandum, did Kenneth Chorley (president of the Williamsburg restoration and later president of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation) know anything about a Rockefeller link to Germantown. Furthermore, Chorley had "no idea what they [the Germantowners] have in mind and wonder[ed] on what their 'understanding' [was] based."<sup>40</sup> Hord received a similar reply to his letter from a high-ranking Rockefeller staff member: "We know of no investigations or plans of the character [you] mentioned . . . and are at a loss to know what the basis could be on which your understanding rests."<sup>41</sup>

Yet even firm denials from Rockefeller officials and staff in 1948 that Rockefeller had never had the slightest interest in a Germantown restoration did not put an end to the Rockefeller story, which continued to be repeated with various elaborations as part of an oral tradition for the next half century. One such elaboration would appear to be the assertion (in circulation at the time of this writing) that narrow-minded Germantowners had spurned Rockefeller's early overtures and had thus spoiled the community's chances of becoming a sort of "Williamsburg before Williamsburg."<sup>42</sup> Although untrue, the belief in a Rockefeller connection serves to demonstrate that Colonial Williamsburg was a powerful model for those who wished to promote Germantown's Market Square. The persistence of this belief is also understandable, since it gave legitimacy to the undertaking: if Rockefeller

<sup>38</sup> William T. Hord, chairman, Planning Committee, Germantown Community Council, to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Dec. 27, 1948, *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> Doris Goss to Arthur W. Packard, memorandum, Dec. 29, 1948, *ibid*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> Packard to Hord, Dec. 29, 1948, *ibid*. A search of the Rockefeller Archive Center, at the request of this author in April 1996, also failed to turn up any documentary evidence that John D. Rockefeller, Jr., had ever made the slightest gestures toward Germantown—before, during, or after the restoration of Williamsburg. Levold, telephone interview by author, April 9, 1996.

<sup>42</sup> Barbara W. Silberman, executive director, Germantown Historical Society, interview by author, April 18, 1996.

had once been interested in restoring a portion of Germantown, then members of the community could conclude that the Market Square project must have great merit. Above all, the Rockefeller story has been both comforting and flattering to believe.

It was in this atmosphere of wishful thinking about Rockefeller that the earliest public efforts to create a miniature Williamsburg on Market Square were launched. Leading the initial effort was Leighton Stradley, the senior partner of a prestigious Philadelphia law firm, who served as president of the Germantown Historical Society from 1947 to 1953.<sup>43</sup> However, the original idea for such a project probably came from Arthur O. Rosenlund (1900-89), who was president of the Germantown Mutual Fire Insurance Company. In the early summer of 1946 Rosenlund had proposed moving his insurance offices into the Fromberger House on Market Square, a property that he had just purchased and proposed to "restore."<sup>44</sup> Although the notion of a colonial "restoration" on Market Square may well have begun with Rosenlund, the first serious attempts to engage others in the effort came through a series of letters from Leighton Stradley in August 1948 to property owners around the square or to potential supporters of the "restoration." This correspondence, then, would seem to be the nearest thing to a formal beginning of the Market Square project.<sup>45</sup>

In order to promote the Market Square undertaking (and kindred restoration projects) before a wider audience Stradley launched a quarterly magazine in January 1949 for the Germantown Historical Society called the *Germantown Crier*. Its name was obviously taken from the town crier of colonial times, and in fact early issues of the magazine included the cartoon character of a colonial crier on the front cover.

In March 1950 Stradley joined earlier advocates of the colonial revival in Germantown in proposing that the physical remains of the past could help local citizens to imbibe the aura of sacrifice and community spirit which had led to American independence and had made the country great.

<sup>43</sup> *Crier* 1 (1949), 23; 8 (1956), 26; *The Shingle* (published by the Philadelphia Bar Association) 15 (1952), 201-2.

<sup>44</sup> G. Edwin Brumbaugh to Arthur O. Rosenlund, June 25, 1946, Brumbaugh Papers (hereafter, BP), Office Records, box 26, Winterthur Library.

<sup>45</sup> This correspondence is in the Stradley Papers, GHS.

In some measure, at least, all of us grasp a feeling of . . . reality when we visit historic sites and behold the actual surroundings in which history was made. Such experiences bring us closer in sympathy and respect for the titanic struggles in which our nation was born and preserved. . . . It was to encourage such respect and to keep alive the inspiring traditions of this community that our Society was founded in 1900.<sup>46</sup>

In that same issue, society member Katherine E. Elkington offered similar sentiments about the Deshler-Morris House (1772), a property located directly across Germantown Avenue from Market Square and now dubbed the "Germantown White House" because of Washington's brief stays there in 1793 and 1794.<sup>47</sup> Entitling her article "If George Washington Were Here Again," Elkington associated the old house and its furnishings with the hard-working, upstanding men who had crafted them:

The pleasure one gets from the ancient highboys, the Chippendale chairs, and gorgeous wood trim of cornices and mantels, is second only to the general feeling of solid satisfaction one feels in the perfect relation of windows and doors to floor and ceilings. . . . Undoubtedly, the art of making each room a harmonious whole, a thing of uniformity and beauty, satisfying to the senses and restful to the spirit, must have been a great factor in making our ancestors the kind of folk they were, substantial and genuine.<sup>48</sup>

Although Elkington and Stradley—and Weygandt too—were writing during the second quarter of the twentieth century, their approach to architecture, furniture, and other artifacts from the colonial period was reminiscent of the romantic associationism that had prevailed throughout the nineteenth century. Broadly defined, associationism is an interpretive approach to the arts which holds that paintings, sculpture, buildings, and decorative objects affect the well-being of individuals, as well as entire societies, by causing people to *associate* themselves with certain thoughts, feelings, and values. By extension, unattractive and badly built structures reflect a basic dishonesty and ugliness of spirit within the society which has given rise to them. At the same time, this dishonesty and ugliness are perpetuated in the

<sup>46</sup> Leighton Stradley, *Crier* 2 (1950), 24.

<sup>47</sup> The house was restored in the late 1940s, reluctantly and under pressure from the local congressional delegation, by the National Park Service. See Tinkcom et al., *Historic Germantown*, 66-67.

<sup>48</sup> Katherine E. Elkington, "If George Washington Were Here Again," *Crier* 2 (1950), 16.

hearts and minds of all who beheld such misbegotten works.<sup>49</sup>

Although there were many apostles of such associationist theories in the English-speaking world, the person most closely linked with these ideas was the English social reformer and art critic, John Ruskin (1819-1900).<sup>50</sup> Ruskin was widely read by educated Americans well into the twentieth century, and his views about art and architecture may have been familiar to Germantown's colonialists, especially to someone like Cornelius Weygandt, who had taught literature for years at Penn.

The mid-twentieth-century Germantown from which devotees of the colonial were trying to escape through a flight into the past could be understood in various ways. On one level it seemed every bit as prosperous as it had been fifty years before when the Site and Relic Society had been founded. Scores of factories and mills continued to provide jobs for area residents, and the community's principal shopping district, focusing around the intersection of Germantown and Cheltenham avenues, was still vibrant, attracting shoppers from the entire northwestern section of Philadelphia. By the mid-1950s, in fact, Germantown provided the second largest shopping district in the entire metropolitan area, surpassed only by downtown Philadelphia itself.<sup>51</sup> The population of the 22d Ward (comprising Germantown and the old German Township) had also increased from 108,000 in 1940 to 113,000 in 1950.<sup>52</sup>

Yet postwar prosperity had brought more automobiles and congestion to Germantown streets. Much of the older, working-class housing, which was of low quality to begin with, was in serious disrepair and threatened to become slum housing for poor families moving into the community. According to the Germantown Historical Society's official historian (who was more a chronicler of yearly happenings in the community than a professional historian), crime had reached new heights during 1948 and

<sup>49</sup> An associationist approach to architecture and decoration continues to be employed in theme parks like Disney World and in certain restaurants where diners are made to feel that they have entered a faraway time or foreign land.

<sup>50</sup> Ruskin's associationist ideas of art and architecture are discussed in Kristen Ottenson Garrigan, *Ruskin on Architecture: His Thoughts and Influence* (Madison, Wis., 1973). Ruskin developed these ideas most forcefully in his *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851).

<sup>51</sup> Historian's Report, GHS, 1949-50, 1950-51, 1957-58.

<sup>52</sup> Historian's Report, GHS, 1949-50.

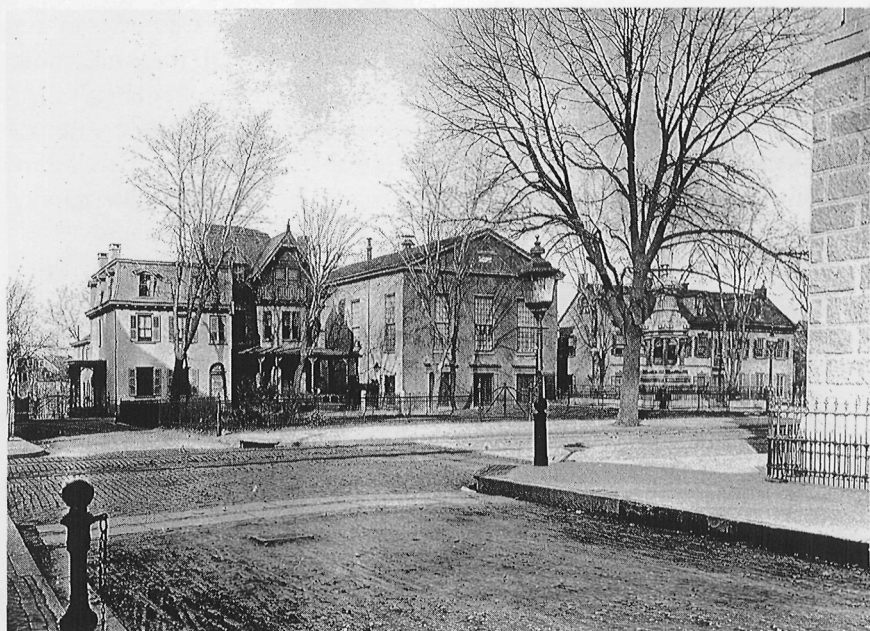


Fig. 3. Market Square in the mid-1880s (looking east), showing the newly erected Civil War monument, and the 1798 Fromberger House (far right). Courtesy of Germantown Historical Society.

1949.<sup>53</sup> In October 1951 the historian was moved to write, "I sometimes wish that Germantown was still the sleepy little village of bygone days and not the bustling community of today where anything can, and usually does, happen."<sup>54</sup> Postwar Germantown thus seemed to offer some of the best and worst of city life.

As in the past, it was the negative signs that seemed to concern the colonial advocates most, and that concern may have been what kept them from appreciating the difficulties of creating a miniature Williamsburg on Market Square. One of the most serious shortcomings of the site was the age of the buildings on the square. While there were several prerevolutionary structures near Market Square (including the Deshler-Morris House across Germantown Avenue), there was no edifice on the square itself that had

<sup>53</sup> Historian's Report, GHS, 1948-49.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1950-51.

been built before 1776.<sup>55</sup> To be sure, colonial revivalists throughout the country were somewhat casual about what they considered to be colonial. Often, "colonial" included any building put up before 1830 (or even 1840); as long as it was pre-Victorian and it was somewhat colonial in spirit. Allowing for some elasticity of dates, one might admit into the colonial category the red-brick Fromberger House, located on the east side of the square and erected about 1798 (fig. 3).<sup>56</sup>

Beyond the Fromberger House, however, there was nothing else on the square that could even vaguely qualify as colonial. Adjoining the Fromberger property, for example, was the Market Square Presbyterian Church. It was designed in a Gothic-Romanesque style in 1887 and stood on a lot that had been occupied by two earlier churches (1839 and 1733). Although there were photographs of the 1839 edifice, there were no surviving images of the 1733 structure.<sup>57</sup> At the square's north end stood a three-story building constructed in 1885 to house the offices of the Germantown Mutual Life Insurance Company. Eclectic in design, it sat on the site of an earlier Dutch colonial dwelling known as the Delaplaine House, dating from about 1700 and taken down around 1885 to make way for the insurance company building.<sup>58</sup> Even more problematic was the Victorian Civil War monument erected in the very center of the square in 1883 by the local post of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) (fig. 4). There had once been a prerevolutionary brick market shed and small firehouse in the square, but these had long since disappeared.

Another problem with Market Square stemmed from the fact that it was not part of an isolated, essentially rural community like Williamsburg, Virginia, at the time of its restoration. Instead, Market Square fronted on a busy thoroughfare in a densely populated portion of northwest Philadelphia, where it would be impossible to separate a "restored" square from the sights and sounds of modern urban life. If this were not enough, the entire neighborhood adjoining the square to the east was made up of brick row houses that had been built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

<sup>55</sup> *Crier* 1 (1949), 9-10, 23; 2 (1950), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Tinkcom et al., *Historic Germantown*, 74.

<sup>57</sup> *Crier* 2 (1950), 18-19.

<sup>58</sup> *Crier* 11 (1959), 10.

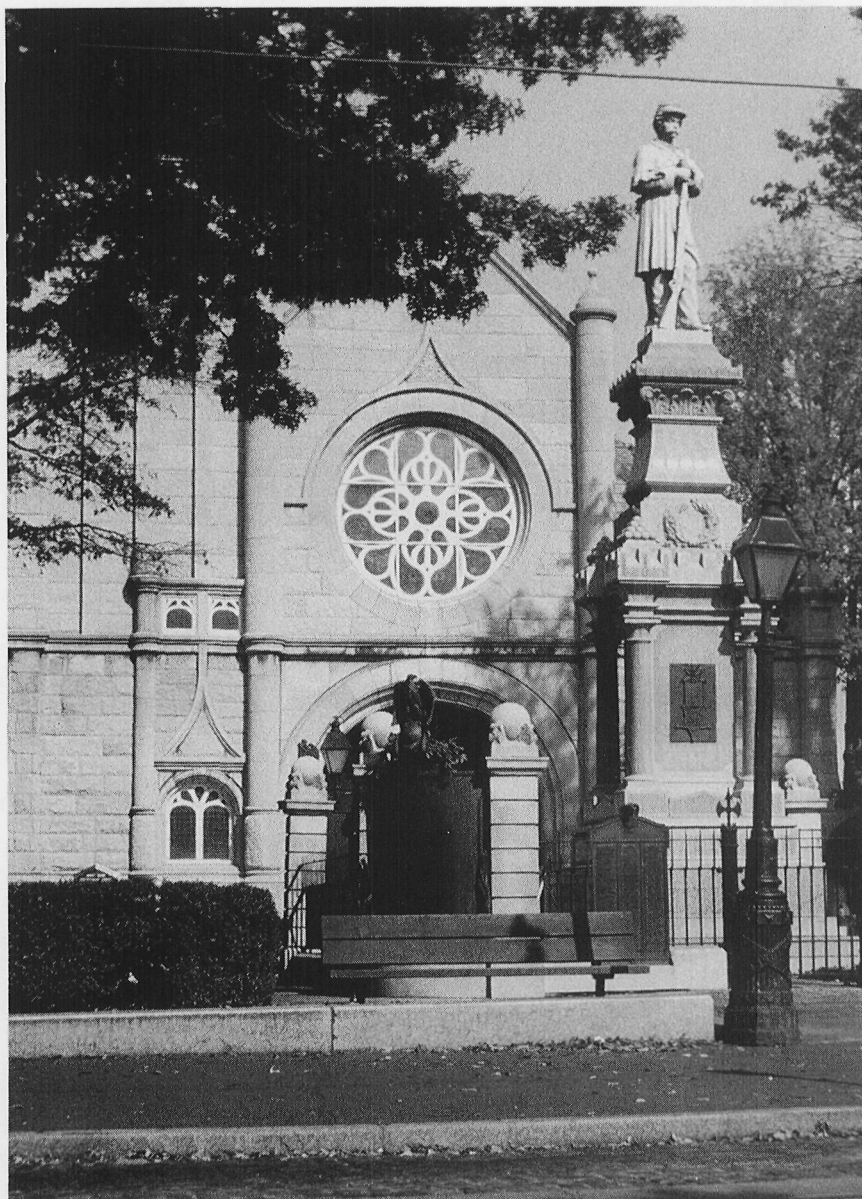


Fig. 4. The Gothic-Romanesque Market Square Presbyterian Church (1887) and the Civil War monument, as they appeared in October 1991. Photo by author.

Finally, there were no events of signal importance that had taken place in or around the square except for Washington's two brief stays at the Deshler-Morris House. And since all the buildings from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had disappeared, there was not even the advantage of having structures to show what an early Pennsylvania German community may have been like.

Undaunted by these facts, Germantown's postwar colonial revivalists were determined to have their miniature Williamsburg on the square. They would recreate the buildings that had disappeared (as had been done in some cases at Williamsburg itself), superimpose new colonial facades on others, and, in the instance of the Market Square Presbyterian Church, put up a wholly new building that was colonial in spirit.

In 1948 the Germantown Historical Society engaged G. Edwin Brumbaugh (1890-1988), an architect who specialized in colonial restorations. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Architecture, Brumbaugh was the son of Martin G. Brumbaugh, who had served as governor of Pennsylvania early in the century. Brumbaugh's most famous commission was the Ephrata Cloister at Ephrata, Pennsylvania, where the restoration work had begun in 1941.<sup>59</sup> Unlike the Market Square site, the Ephrata Cloister had much to offer in the way of specific instruction about the life and times of the Pennsylvania German religious community that had existed there in the eighteenth century. Brumbaugh was also known as a designer of new structures in the colonial style, including residences and commercial properties.<sup>60</sup>

That Brumbaugh himself connected the Market Square project with Colonial Williamsburg is evident from a letter that he wrote in June 1946 to Arthur O. Rosenlund, who would later become the major actor in the Market Square "restoration." Rosenlund was then in the process of purchasing the Fromberger House for the Germantown Mutual Fire Insurance Company, with the intention of moving the company's offices into the old building. Following a preliminary visit to the property, Brumbaugh

<sup>59</sup> Stradley to Brumbaugh, Aug. 13, 1948, GHS. On Brumbaugh, see Ann L. Strong and George E. Thomas, *The Book of 100 Years: The Graduate School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1990), 80-81, and Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects* (Philadelphia, 1985), 114-16.

<sup>60</sup> A number of drawings for such commercial and residential commissions may be found in the Brumbaugh Papers, Rendered Studies.

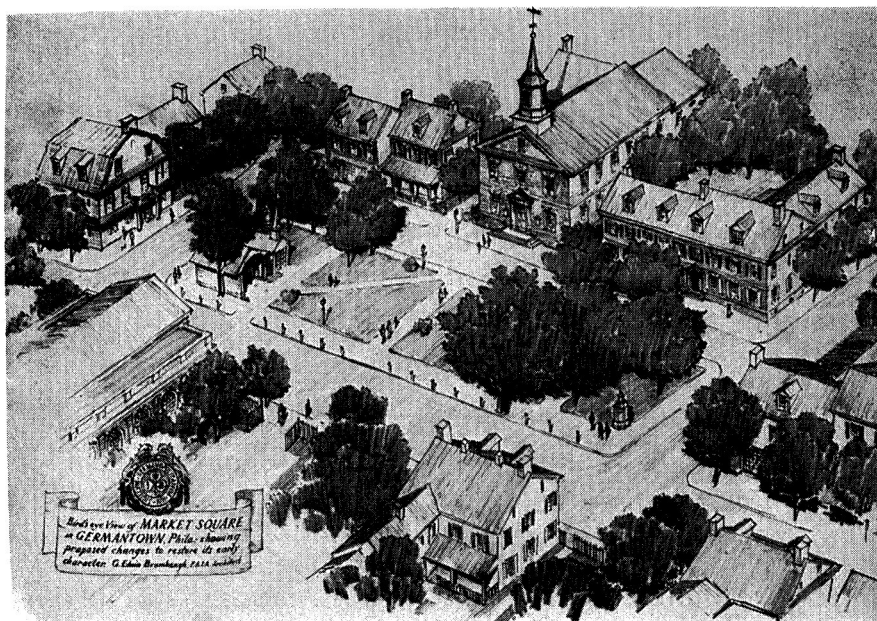


Fig. 5. G. Edwin Brumbaugh's vision of Germantown's "miniature Williamsburg" on Market Square. From the cover of the *Germantown Crier*, September 1949.

wrote to Rosenlund, "The country is beginning to recognize the factor of attraction inherent in our early architecture. Williamsburg lures untold numbers of visitors [every year]."<sup>61</sup>

Brumbaugh's letter is revealing in other ways. Seeing the work on the Fromberger House as part of a larger refashioning of the square (some two years before he would be officially approached by the Germantown Historical Society about the matter), Brumbaugh ruled out an academically precise approach to the project. In his own words, "It is not practical to attempt an archaeological restoration of the area, but the *old atmosphere* could be recreated [emphasis added]."<sup>62</sup> In other words, Brumbaugh was quite willing to make colonial style renovations in order to create an aesthetic effect regardless of whether the end result was historically accurate. In this sense his views were very much in line with the local colonialists who were

<sup>61</sup> Brumbaugh to Rosenlund, June 25, 1946, BP, Office Records, box 26.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

more interested in evoking a mood, in the best associationist tradition, than they were in accurate restorations.

For the Market Square project Brumbaugh made use of some old drawings and photographs that belonged to the Germantown Historical Society to produce an attractive design. Although these plans were carefully drawn, they shared the dreamy quality of the renderings that Joseph Pennell had made of Germantown a half century before. A sample of Brumbaugh's drawings appeared in the *Crier* for September 1949 and in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* that same November (fig. 5).<sup>63</sup>

The first structure on the square to be redesigned by Brumbaugh was the Fromberger House, and construction finally commenced in 1953. Initiating this project, as noted earlier, was Rosenlund, who became the principal force in the Market Square undertaking after the resignation of Stradley as president of the Germantown Historical Society in 1953. According to local tradition, Rosenlund was so enamored of Colonial Williamsburg that he made a pilgrimage to the Virginia site at least once a year.<sup>64</sup>

The work on the Fromberger House in particular reflects the romantic quality of the whole Market Square project, as well as its lack of historical authenticity. Although early drawings and photographs of the building show that it was made up of at least three adjoining structures, architect Brumbaugh created a uniform facade for it, with an elegant central doorway and balanced fenestration that had never existed at any time before the 1950s (figs. 6, 7). According to the contractor who did the restoration work, Brumbaugh had based his design on the "Morris House" on South Eighth Street in Philadelphia, which, intriguingly, had been the subject of one of Pennell's dreamy renderings several decades before.<sup>65</sup> Beauty and atmosphere but not historical accuracy had clearly been Brumbaugh's goals in reshaping the Fromberger House.

After moving into the Fromberger House, the fire insurance company proceeded to demolish its 1885 building at the north end of the square. In its place they erected, in 1959-60, a replica of the circa 1700 Delaplaine

<sup>63</sup> *Crier* 1 (1949), front cover; *Evening Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1949.

<sup>64</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 14, 1989. This oral tradition was shared with the author by Lisabeth Holloway, as identified above.

<sup>65</sup> William J. Cornell, telephone interview by author, Nov. 1, 1991; Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *Our Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1914), pl. op. 273.



Fig. 6. The Fromberger House during the early twentieth century when it was home to the Germantown YWCA. Courtesy of Germantown Historical Society.

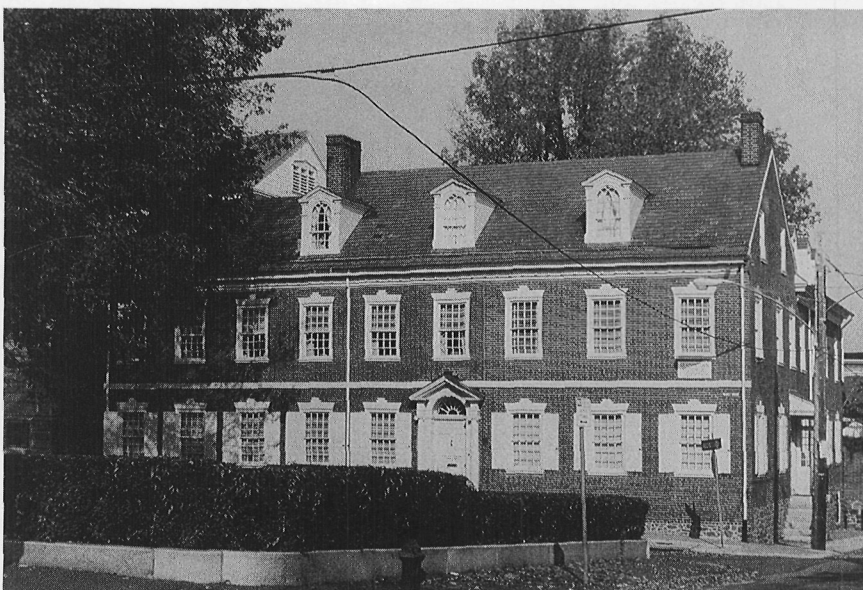


Fig. 7. The "restored" Fromberger House as it appeared in October 1991. Photo by author.

House, also designed by Brumbaugh at various stages during the 1950s. Based on a photograph of the structure taken shortly before its demolition in the mid-1880s, the exterior of the new Delaplaine House at least resembled the original as it appeared toward the end of the nineteenth century. There was no attempt at accurately restoring the interior, which was fitted up as a local bank branch and decorated with colonial revival furnishings and light fixtures.<sup>66</sup>

Although the Market Square advocates could not then know it, renovation of the Fromberger House and construction of a new Delaplaine House marked the limits of what could be done with the site. The congregation of the Market Square Presbyterian Church, which sat front and center on the east side of the square, refused to tear down and replace their 1887 building, a project that would have cost them several hundred thousand dollars, even in the early 1950s.<sup>67</sup> The idea of putting a colonial-style facade on the Victorian rectory next door to the church was also rejected.<sup>68</sup> Another great disappointment was the refusal of the owners of a commercial property at the south end of the square to sell an Italianate-style commercial structure (c. 1860) so that it could be refashioned in the colonial mode.<sup>69</sup>

But by far the greatest problem confronting the Market Square advocates was the Civil War monument that occupied the very middle of the square (on part of the ground where the old market shed and firehouse had once stood). Brumbaugh had anticipated the problem in his first letter to Rosenlund back in June 1946.<sup>70</sup> Disputes over the monument lasted for a quarter century, divided the community needlessly, and illustrated some of the most serious shortcomings of the Market Square project and of the whole colonial revival movement in Germantown. As John Bodnar has pointed out, such

<sup>66</sup> Harold D. Saylor to Rosenlund, Jan. 29, 1960, GHS; *Crier* 11 (1959), 10; 12 (1960), 1; 14 (1962), 20.

<sup>67</sup> Stradley to Reverend Ellsworth Erskine Jackson, Aug. 11, 1948; Virginia Brandenstein (church secretary), Market Square Presbyterian Church, to Stradley, Nov. 23, 1948; Stradley, office memorandum, Dec. 1, 1948, GHS.

<sup>68</sup> This idea was proposed to architect Brumbaugh by Stradley in a letter dated Feb. 23, 1949, BP, Surveys, box 4.

<sup>69</sup> Stradley to Rosenlund, Jan. 24, 1951, GHS. The battle over this property, located at 5443-45 Germantown Avenue, continued well into the early 1970s. See Brumbaugh to Charles S. Squire, Nov. 10, 1969; Charles R. Tyson to Brumbaugh, Jan. 6, 1972, BP, Completed Work, box 2.

<sup>70</sup> Brumbaugh to Rosenlund, June 25, 1946, BP, Office Records, box 26.

disputes arise when there are competing views of the past on the local level.<sup>71</sup>

As early as February 1948 Stradley and the Germantown Historical Society board had concluded officially that the Civil War monument would have to be moved from the square in order to fulfill their plans. After some discussion they proposed to have it relocated in Vernon Park, about a mile north of Market Square but still near Germantown Avenue.<sup>72</sup> In a letter to the president of the Philadelphia City Council, Stradley held that the monument was "the chief obstacle to the restoration and improvement of the Square." "It would be absurd," he continued, "to offer as an authentic Colonial prospect a Market Square dominated by so glaring an anachronism as a Civil War Monument."<sup>73</sup> Besides, he insisted, the monument was too close to the street for anyone to appreciate it properly, and it had been neglected so badly in recent years that it needed serious repair. Finally, he declared, the Civil War veterans should never have erected it on the square in the first place, since the site had played a role in the Battle of Germantown. The monument had thus invaded "premises which were sacred to Revolutionary War veterans . . . at a time when the Revolutionary War had been concluded a hundred years before and when there were no Revolutionary War representatives to press the Revolutionary interests."<sup>74</sup> Put less politely, the Civil War monument was a squatter on the square and had to be removed.

What Stradley failed to mention in his letter, but which he admitted elsewhere, was that the square had been the center of the British line during the Revolutionary War battle.<sup>75</sup> Thus if the Civil War monument were desecrating holy ground, it was ground that had been hallowed by enemy troops who were fighting to keep Americans from winning their independence. That Stradley and the other supporters of the Market Square

<sup>71</sup> Perhaps the most intense disputes in recent years among various groups in the United States over the meaning of the past arose during the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first landing in the Americas. While Italian Americans used the anniversary to laud the achievements of this Genoese mariner (and by implication Italians and Italian Americans), many Native Americans (that is, Indians) insisted that Columbus was a genocidal murderer.

<sup>72</sup> James W. Wister to Stradley, Feb. 17, 1948; John T. Campbell to Stradley, Feb. 23, 1950; and Saylor to Walter Biddle Saul, Oct. 6, 1952, GHS.

<sup>73</sup> Stradley to Frederick D. Garman, president, Philadelphia City Council, GHS. The letter is undated but it appears to have been written in March 1950.

<sup>74</sup> Stradley to Joseph K. Cox, Feb. 6, 1950. See also Stradley to Albert H. Revels, July 19, 1948, and Stradley to Frederick Barden, July 22, 1948, GHS.

<sup>75</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 29, 1950.

project could so diminish the colossal struggle of the Civil War, which had attained the status of a great national epic by the mid-twentieth century and which remains America's costliest war in lives lost, is a powerful indication of the extent to which they were blinded by their romantic notions of the colonial past.

At least one individual long associated with the Germantown Historical Society (who did not wish to be named) believed that the conflict over the Civil War monument was based partly on class divisions. According to her, the descendants of local Civil War veterans, and members of the other veterans' organizations who supported them, did not generally belong to Germantown's social elite and thus were resented by the more well-to-do organizers of the Market Square project.<sup>76</sup> In addition, having colonial ancestors (and, by definition, anyone who had fought in the American Revolution) had long been connected with "old family," upper-class standing in Philadelphia—and in many other communities in the eastern United States. Indeed, according to Baltzell, having prerevolutionary American ancestry and having established one's family socially before the Civil War were essential characteristics for acceptance into Philadelphia's polite society well into the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>77</sup> Having an ancestor who had fought in the Civil War was far less important to achieving social acceptance in Germantown than having a revolutionary forebear.

Unfortunately, the proponents of the Market Square "restoration" seem not to have realized that one could associate the Civil War, including the monument in Market Square, with a second American revolution—with what Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address had called a "new birth of freedom." Further, by seeing the Civil War as a triumph over slavery, the local "restorers" could have linked the monument with Germantown's founder, Francis Daniel Pastorius, who had penned the first antislavery petition in North America—and had done so right in Germantown itself. Nor was any opinion on this matter expressed by the growing African-American community in Germantown, for whom a Civil War monument may have indeed been more meaningful than a pretty colonial square. In any case, with minds fixed on physical appearances, it probably did not occur to the supporters of the Market Square project to consider any connections

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous interview, July 23, 1991.

<sup>77</sup> Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, 70-106.

between the Civil War and the American Revolution.

No matter how hard they argued, the Germantown Historical Society and other Market Square advocates could not overcome opposition to moving the monument. Leading the counterattack were the descendants of Germantown's Civil War veterans, organized as the Ellis Camp of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. (This was a successor to the local post of the GAR, the last members of which had died in the 1930s.) The local "Sons" received the vigorous support of the Pennsylvania Department of the Allied Orders of the Grand Army of the Republic. Other veterans' organizations also condemned the plan to remove the monument, including the United Spanish War Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and the Combined Veterans' Committee of Germantown. All these groups insisted that moving the monument would be a grave insult to the memories of those men who had fought and died in the Civil War, as well as a betrayal of trust with the generation that had erected the monument.<sup>78</sup>

The clash with the various veterans organizations grew so heated that the Germantown Historical Society stopped its campaign to remove the memorial. After Leighton Stradley left the presidency in 1953, his successor, Harold D. Saylor (1892-1981), a highly respected judge and member of the Philadelphia bar, led the society to take a somewhat different approach to historic preservation.<sup>79</sup> The society decided to purchase and restore older buildings (virtually all of them along the Germantown Avenue corridor but not necessarily around Market Square) as they came up for sale. In toto, the society acquired about a dozen historic properties over the years.

Although the Germantown Historical Society did not withdraw all support for the Market Square project, a new organization, Colonial Germantown, Inc. (a name obviously inspired by Colonial Williamsburg), assumed direction of the project. This nonprofit organization was instituted in March 1956 by Arthur Rosenlund, who was still head of the Germantown

<sup>78</sup> *Germantown Courier*, Feb. 2, 1950, March 23, 1950; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 2, 1950; Jacob Hertle, quartermaster general, Harry C. Egbert Camp No. 42, United Spanish War Veterans, to Stradley, Aug. 15, 1949; Stradley to Hertle, Dec. 15, 1949; Stradley to Paul L. Tiers, Jan. 6, 1950; Joseph D. Walsh, adjutant, Henry H. Houston, 2nd, Post No. 3, American Legion, to Stradley, April 19, 1950; Resolution of Henry H. Houston 2nd, Post No. 3, American Legion, April 18, 1950, GHS.

<sup>79</sup> James E. Mooney, "Harold Durston Saylor," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 105 (1981), 245-48; *Crier* 33 (1981), 18.

Mutual Fire Insurance Company.<sup>80</sup> Rosenlund served as president of the new group, with Judge Saylor as one of three vice presidents. The minutes of Colonial Germantown's first meeting describe the organization as a "foundation to solicit and accept contributions from property owners on the square or otherwise, to the end and purpose that the *colonial atmosphere* may be created, preserved and maintained [emphasis added]."<sup>81</sup> As in Brumbaugh's letter of a decade earlier, it was atmosphere—and not historical accuracy—that counted most.

At their initial meeting Rosenlund renewed the campaign to remove the Civil War monument from the square and urged the group to raise as much money as it could—and as soon as possible. Only now it was proposed to relocate the monument to the grounds of the Germantown High School, across the street from Vernon Park. However, the great cost of transferring the monument, then estimated at between \$15,000 and \$20,000, precluded any immediate progress. Rosenlund's insurance company donated \$5,000, and by January 1960 Colonial Germantown had managed to raise almost \$19,000. The Philadelphia Board of Education had, meanwhile, given its permission for the removal of the monument to the high school grounds. Then just as everything seemed to fall into place, the veterans groups renewed their protests and at least one of the corporate sponsors of Colonial Germantown threatened to withdraw its support from the organization if the plan went forward. Consequently, the removal scheme was again put on hold to await a more propitious time.<sup>82</sup> In the midst of the renewed campaign to move the monument, Colonial Germantown had approached the Market Square Presbyterian Church to ask if the congregation would reconsider replacing their Gothic-Romanesque edifice with a new colonial-style church. Once more the answer was no.<sup>83</sup>

In April 1962 Colonial Germantown, Inc., reorganized itself. In an effort to raise more money it offered contributing memberships, with an annual donation of \$500. Some twenty-four contributing members were secured,

<sup>80</sup> Minutes, Colonial Germantown (hereafter, Min. Col. Ger.), March 22, 1956. (The minutes and other primary sources relating to this organization may be found in the Colonial Germantown Papers, GHS.) For a brief history of Colonial Germantown, Inc., during its first decade, see Jack Hornung, "Rebuilding Germantown: A Progress Report," *Crier* 17 (1965).

<sup>81</sup> Min. Col. Ger., July 19, 1956.

<sup>82</sup> Min. Col. Ger., Oct. 24, 1956, Oct. 15, 1957, Jan. 6, 1960, Nov. 22, 1961, Oct. 9, 1962, April 14, 1964.

<sup>83</sup> Min. Col. Ger., Jan. 6, 1960.

including representatives from the principal financial and corporate bodies with operations in the Germantown area. The organization also hired its first executive director, John J. "Jack" Hornung, a professional planning consultant. Finally, it decided to broaden its scope beyond Market Square in order to assist with urban development in Germantown, although it was clear that Colonial Germantown hoped to divert part of any redevelopment funds to Market Square.<sup>84</sup>

By this time the Market Square project was receiving serious criticism from professional historians. One of them was Margaret B. Tinkcom, who had undertaken a series of studies on Germantown over the years. These included a survey of historic buildings published under the title *Historic Germantown* (1955), written in collaboration with her husband and fellow historian, Harry M. Tinkcom, and architect Grant Miles Simon.<sup>85</sup>

By the mid-1960s Tinkcom was clearly dissatisfied with the vague associationist approach to renovating Market Square. In an article for the *Crier* she wrote, "Even today it is usually the [Joseph] Pennell picture of Germantown . . . that comes to mind when an old resident thinks of his town. Germantown Avenue as Pennell presented it was tree-lined, rather romantic in appearance, quiet—almost somnolent in fact—and obviously well-bred."<sup>86</sup>

Yet early tax records and other sources, Tinkcom asserted, did not show colonial Germantown to be a sleepy rural hamlet. On the contrary, Germantown had been a busy market town and manufacturing center from a very early time, where the hawking of wares and making of money were certainly not marks of personal disgrace, as some aficionados of the colonial revival seemed to think.<sup>87</sup>

In a 1966 report for Colonial Germantown itself, Tinkcom pointed out that Market Square was often muddy and unkempt, with paths worn across it in random fashion, at least until the Morris family (who lived opposite the square in the "Germantown White House") had planted grass and trees on

<sup>84</sup> Min. Col. Ger., April 13, 1962, April 9, 1963, April 14, 1964, Dec. 17, 1965; Hornung, "Rebuilding Germantown," 17-21.

<sup>85</sup> Min. Col. Ger., May 11, 1959.

<sup>86</sup> Margaret B. Tinkcom, "Germantown in Review," *Crier* 17 (1965), 73.

<sup>87</sup> Drawing somewhat similar conclusions a decade later was Stephanie Grauman Wolf in her *Urban Village*, especially 58-126. Wolf also wrote an insightful article about the colonial revival in Germantown for the *Crier* 37 (1985), 82-85.

the site in the 1830s. In the same piece Tinkcom recommended that the Civil War monument be retained as a reminder of "the continuing vitality of the old market place. . . ."<sup>88</sup>

The following year, 1967, Tinkcom again warned against a dreamy and false reconfiguration of the square: "All artificiality must be eschewed in planning its renewal. The square has too much solid worth to be turned into something pretty but phony, something a Helen Hakinson [that is, a social-climbing] clubwoman would exclaim over. Such an approach would serve neither history nor Germantown in the long run."<sup>89</sup>

Sharing many of Tinkcom's concerns was a report by the architectural firm of Bower and Fradley to the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority in 1966 and another by the Philadelphia Historical Commission in 1972. In concert with a growing number of architects and historic preservationists, these critics believed that Market Square should be allowed to display the "historical continuity" of the site by retaining several periods of architecture and development, including the Civil War monument and the Victorian structure on the south side of the square. Jack Hornung, executive director of Colonial Germantown, found himself in essential agreement with these views and tried unsuccessfully to get the officers of the organization to see some merit in the recent criticisms.<sup>90</sup>

For Brumbaugh, who was still bent on fashioning an attractive colonial atmosphere for the square, such proposals were disastrous. Having matured during the early decades of the twentieth century, when architects, reformers, and many members of the American public looked upon Victorian architecture as ugly and corrupt, he was unlikely to appreciate mid- or late-nineteenth-century design. He wrote to the officers of Colonial Germantown, proclaiming a message that would have made John Ruskin proud: "Architecture is more than bricks, stone, and plaster. It is a graphic

<sup>88</sup> Margaret B. Tinkcom, "Germantown's Market Square," for Colonial Germantown, Inc., Dec. 23, 1966.

<sup>89</sup> Margaret B. Tinkcom, "Market Square," *Crier* 19 (1967), 75.

<sup>90</sup> Bower and Fradley, Architects, "Technical Report, General Germantown Urban Renewal Area, Redevelopment Authority, City of Philadelphia," 1966; Jack Hornung to the president and chairman and members of the Historical Preservation Committee, Colonial Germantown, Inc., Jan. 13, 1967, Colonial Germantown Papers; Rosenlund to Saylor, Jan. 27, 1967, GHS; Charles R. Tyson, chairman, Philadelphia Historical Commission, to Brumbaugh, Jan. 6, 1972, BP, Completed Works, box 2.

portrayal of the social conditions of the period that produced it. . . ."<sup>91</sup> Complaining further about the idea of allowing buildings from different periods to coexist side by side so as to demonstrate the evolution of architecture and local life, Brumbaugh added, "That sort of programming means that every restoration in America, designed to portray and stress the worthy aspects of our constructive history (from Williamsburg to Independence Hall) have been mistakes."<sup>92</sup> And to Arthur Rosenlund he wrote in much the same vein: "The people who accept and continue this [modern preservation] practice are operating to destroy respect for and exemplification of that which is our most precious heritage."<sup>93</sup>

Like the various sponsors of the Market Square project, Brumbaugh never explained just what that heritage meant or precisely what it was that Market Square had to teach about the colonial period beyond some vague assertions that the past had somehow been more honest or more attractive than the present. This was essentially the problem that had been pointed out by several historians who were critical of the Market Square project. While admitting that Germantown was unique in being the first German-American settlement in what would become the United States, the critics observed that none of the physical remains from that early German period had survived in the Market Square area—or anywhere else in the vicinity. In other words, Colonial Germantown's notion that ill-defined virtues from the past could be recalled by exhibiting structures that did not even date from the colonial period lent no great significance to the site.<sup>94</sup>

Such critics might have added that Germantown could not hope to compete with other colonial and revolutionary sites in the Philadelphia area, either for funds or for tourists. With Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, Valley Forge, and Washington's Crossing in such close proximity, Germantown faced overwhelming competition exacerbated by the fact that

<sup>91</sup> Brumbaugh to Gordon W. Venable, president, Colonial Germantown, Inc., Sept. 18, 1972, BP, Completed Works, box 2.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. In invoking the example of Independence Hall, Brumbaugh probably had in mind the demolition during the 1950s of a number of nineteenth-century structures from the Independence Hall area as part of an effort to create a colonial ambience around this national shrine. In fact, there had been a prolonged and often heated opposition from various quarters to demolishing several mid-nineteenth-century buildings in the Independence Park site. For a discussion of this controversy, see Constance M. Greiff, *Independence: The Creation of a National Park* (Philadelphia, 1987), especially 77-112.

<sup>93</sup> Brumbaugh to Rosenlund, Sept. 18, 1972, BP, Completed Works, box 2.

<sup>94</sup> These views are summarized in Hornung to the president et al., Jan. 13, 1967, cited above.

Germantown was difficult to find for anyone not familiar with the region.<sup>95</sup>

Ironically, many of the objections raised by architects and professional historians had been anticipated virtually from the beginning by Edward W. Hocker. He was for many years librarian of the Germantown Historical Society and the author of a well-received history of Germantown published in 1933.<sup>96</sup> In 1948 Hocker had written to Leighton Stradley warning him of the many pitfalls that would attend the Market Square project.

I wonder whether those who have from time to time proposed to "restore" Market Square to its condition in colonial times realize that this would mean . . . cutting down all the fine trees now on the ground[,] . . . [p]lowing up the sod and removing the coping[,] . . . [m]aking the place a bare open lot with footpaths worn across it at haphazard intervals [,] . . . [o]bliterating the work which several generations of the Morris family gave . . . to beautify the Square [,] . . . [a]nd demolishing or removing the Civil War monument. This monument may be hideous according to modern taste, but the tablets bear the names of all of Germantown's Civil War soldiers, and any attempt to tamper with it will arouse a storm among patriotic organizations.<sup>97</sup>

Germantown's most respected historian of the time had offered the advocates of the Market Square project a serious reality check from the very start, but they had chosen to ignore it, only to be confronted by similar objections throughout the course of their undertaking.

The prospects for a "miniature Williamsburg" on Germantown's Market Square declined rapidly after widely publicized criticisms in the 1960s and early 1970s. The Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority in particular was unhappy with the inexacting and romantic approach that Colonial Germantown and, earlier, the Germantown Historical Society had taken toward the project. The high costs of the Vietnam War and growing inflation in the early 1970s resulted in a smaller allocation of redevelopment funds for Germantown than was originally anticipated. If all this were not enough, the students, faculty, and administration of Germantown High School vociferously opposed moving the Civil War monument from Market Square to the school grounds, seeing it as a glorification of war at a time of

<sup>95</sup> An excellent article on the overabundance of historic sites and house museums in the Philadelphia area, including Germantown, appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 7, 1991.

<sup>96</sup> Hocker, *Germantown, 1683-1933*.

<sup>97</sup> Edward W. Hocker to Stradley, Feb. 13, 1948, GHS.

growing doubts about the conflict in Southeast Asia.<sup>98</sup>

Upon hearing of the high school protest, Brumbaugh fired off a somewhat angry letter to the Philadelphia Board of Education that underlined his basic conservatism, as well as his simplistic and even nostalgic view of the American past:

Perhaps I am out of date, but I cannot help feeling that when your country is at war you should support it or go to some other land. . . . War is still an accepted tool of authority and most of our wars have been undertaken in behalf of righteousness. . . . One of the effects of an opposite viewpoint is a breakdown in patriotism.<sup>99</sup>

Meanwhile, Colonial Germantown began to experience financial difficulties. After years of disappointment and controversy, the number of contributing members dwindled and by the summer of 1967 it faced an annual deficit of \$6,000. Board meetings had to be canceled frequently for lack of a quorum. In September 1973 the organization launched its last serious initiative for Market Square when it unsuccessfully petitioned the National Park Service to take title to the property. Colonial Germantown, Inc., held what turned out to be its last formal meeting on May 14, 1975. Fittingly, the board met over lunch at the Germantown Cricket Club, a masterpiece of the colonial revival style that had been designed eighty years before by the renowned beaux arts firm of McKim, Mead, and White.<sup>100</sup>

Contributing to the demise of Colonial Germantown, and to the larger colonial revival movement in the community, was the serious decay that Germantown had experienced since the immediate postwar period. By the mid-1970s urban decline in Germantown was very real, and one could convincingly argue that various periods in the community's past were indeed preferable to the present. The underlying causes of this decline were not hard to find. Most of the factories and mills in and around Germantown had either closed or had moved out of the area, victims of their own aging plants and resultant inefficiencies, of foreign competition, or of cheaper wages in the Sun Belt. The pace of suburbanization had accelerated during the

<sup>98</sup> Richardson Dilworth, president of the Philadelphia Board of Education, to Brumbaugh, April 1, 1971, BP, Completed Works, box 2.

<sup>99</sup> Brumbaugh to Dilworth, April 5, 1971, *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Min. Col. Ger., July 11, 1967, Oct. 8, 1968, Sept. 12, 1973, March 21, 1975, May 14, 1975.

previous two decades. One consequence was the construction of large shopping malls just beyond the boundaries of northwest Philadelphia, which undermined Germantown's own shopping district. In 1978-79 alone, seven major retailers closed their operations in Germantown, including Sears and Roebuck, two supermarkets, and the community's principal department store.<sup>101</sup> Soaring crime rates and the physical decay of Germantown's housing stock caused hundreds of middle-class families, black as well as white, to leave for the suburbs or for less afflicted areas of northwest Philadelphia.

The colonial revival movement in Germantown, and the Market Square project in particular, had done little or nothing to reverse the community's decline. Although architecture, interior decoration, and landscaping can in a broad way reflect the cultures that create them—and can indeed provoke the thoughts and imaginations of some who inhabit or view them—it does not follow that particular designs or restorations can bring back the ideas and values of a former time. Restoring a colonial building or remodeling it in the colonial mode, dressing oneself in colonial costumes, collecting and displaying eighteenth-century artifacts, or reenacting revolutionary battles could not make twentieth-century Germantowners act, feel, and think like colonists. Furthermore, the reality of life in colonial Germantown was never the idyl that the colonial advocates had imagined. At the same time, the proponents of a miniature Williamsburg failed to appreciate numerous practical obstacles to their success. Yet the efforts to promote a colonial revival on Market Square vividly demonstrate the power of historical imagination and the ways in which it can be misappropriated in an attempt to understand an earlier era and, as if by magic, call it back to life through attractive restorations or re-creations. The millions of people each year who visit historic theme parks attest to the lure and escapist possibilities of a prettified version of the past.

Yet the Market Square project was not all in vain. The square is in far better condition today than it would have been if it had been ignored by colonial revivalists a half century ago. Since 1990 the Germantown Historical Society has found an attractive home and ample space for its library and some of its other collections in the Fromberger House, no longer used as an insurance office. As part of a wider colonial revival movement, the Market

<sup>101</sup> Mark Frazier Lloyd, "Germantown in Review, October 1978 through October 1979," *Crier* 31 (1979), 89-91.

Square project helped to garner support for the purchase and restoration of at least a dozen eighteenth-century properties by the Germantown Historical Society. In recognition of these efforts, the Germantown Historic District was designated in 1968 as a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Philadelphia does not have a miniature Williams-burg in Germantown, but as the twenty-first century beckons, the old houses (including the structures on Market Square) are still there to explore and interpret as new ideas and changing times might suggest. If Market Square itself has little to teach about colonial America, or even about colonial Philadelphia, it offers many insights into the colonial revival movement in the United States.

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